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Music Cities Convention 2025, Music in Times of Crisis: Recovery Through Advocacy

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Introduction

In crisis contexts (whether armed conflicts, economic downturns, social emergencies, or profound community transformations) music has become a vital tool for recovery, cohesion, and social resilience. Its ability to create bonds, strengthen identities, and open spaces for free expression makes it a strategic component of cultural policies and social development programs. It is not merely a cultural asset or a consumer product: music is a fundamental human right that must be guaranteed equally for all people.

From the perspective of cultural rights, processes of social appropriation of music strengthen creative diversity and ensure the right to know, practice, and enjoy every form of musical creation. This entails not only the possibility of creating and enjoying music, but also access to its learning, active participation in its practices, and the broad and diverse circulation of its expressions. Promoting music education for children and young people; updating and professionalizing performers; ensuring the sustainability of community organizations; and fostering intergenerational dialogue are all key actions within any cultural policy aimed at equity and inclusion.

Music as a Right and a Driver of Social Transformation

Within this framework, organizations such as the International Music Council have formulated a set of rights that go beyond the protection of authorship and creation. These include: the freedom to express oneself musically; the right to learn musical languages and skills; the right to engage with music through participation, appreciation, creation, and access to information; the opportunity to build an artistic career and share it through all available means; and fair recognition and compensation for creative work.

Guaranteeing these rights not only strengthens the vitality of the musical ecosystem, but also contributes to building fairer, more inclusive, and culturally diverse societies. In this sense, the active participation of children, adolescents, and young people in music education processes contributes to equity in access to creative languages, bridging the gap between those who can afford private music education and those who rely on public or community offerings.

Social Cohesion, Inclusion, and Well-being

Various studies show that collective musical practice tangibly contributes to both personal and social development. At the individual level, it strengthens self-esteem, discipline, emotional regulation, and life aspirations; at the interpersonal level, it expands social networks, improves family communication, fosters values of coexistence, and generates a sense of belonging.

This evidence aligns with theoretical frameworks that recognize music as a catalyst for social and family bonds, as a fundamental component of community rituals and ceremonies, and as a factor that synchronizes collective emotions, reinforcing belonging and identity.

In the urban context, music has the ability to:

- Serve as a space of holistic care for children and youth, reducing risks associated with contexts of violence and exclusion.
- Create more cohesive communities, where cultural diversity becomes a resource rather than a barrier.
- Connect people through shared aesthetic experiences that foster empathy, cooperation, and the building of trust.

This potential resonates with the concept of re-existence proposed by anthropologist Rita Segato: music, when experienced in community, not only resists adversity but also generates new ways of inhabiting and enjoying the world, producing “fissures” in the fabric of inequality and exclusion.

Challenges and Tensions in the Implementation of Music Policies

Despite its proven benefits, the design of music policies and programs faces structural challenges:

- **Political recognition:** ensuring that governments and decision-makers value music as a strategic tool for social transformation.
- **Universal music education:** including music as a compulsory subject from primary school, with quality training that combines artistic excellence, cultural diversity, and creative entrepreneurship.
- **Mobility and circulation:** facilitating the global mobility of musicians and content, ensuring diversity of expressions.
- **Accessibility and inclusion:** guaranteeing access to music without discrimination based on physical, mental, gender, ethnic, or socio-economic conditions.
- **Cultural diversity vs. hegemonies:** moving beyond models that exclusively prioritize repertoires and methodologies of the European classical tradition, recognizing the value of territorial, traditional, and community music.
- **Research and data:** expanding the scientific basis on the benefits of music and implementing standardized systems for collecting information on impact, musical heritage, and industry dynamics.
- **Technological innovation:** leveraging technology for creative processes, content distribution, and innovative training methodologies.

Lines of Action and Future Outlook

To strengthen the role of music in social recovery during times of crisis, it is necessary to:

- **Integrate music into public social development policies** as a crosscutting tool for well-being, inclusion, and resilience.
- **Promote collective and participatory pedagogical models** based on horizontal methodologies, dialogue with local contexts, and respect for cultural diversity.
- **Foster collaborative networks and knowledge-sharing initiatives** that make it possible to document, replicate, and scale up successful practices.
- **Ensure the sustainability of community-based music organizations**, recognizing their role in building social fabric.
- **Encourage the development of active and participatory audiences** who not only consume music, but also create, perform, and reinterpret it.

Bogotá as a UNESCO Creative City of Music:

Since 2012, Bogotá has held the UNESCO designation as a Creative City of Music, positioning it as a regional leader in urban cultural policy, creative economy, and international cooperation. This leadership is reflected in its role as coordinator of the sub-network of UNESCO Creative Cities of Music for Latin America, the United States, and Canada, as well as in its position as Technical Secretariat of the Colombian Network of Creative Cities. Behind this recognition lies a robust ecosystem: According to data from the Observatory of the Secretariat of Culture, Bogotá has more than 1,300 active music groups spanning genres from traditional to experimental; over 70 cultural venues and concert halls; and an educational network of more than 30 music-training institutions, ranging from basic to university levels. The music industry itself also shows strong dynamism: in the past decade, the phonographic industry has grown by more than 200%, while live music consumption reached 95% of all performing arts in 2022 (according to the Satellite Account of Cultural and Creative Economy).

These figures are complemented by the cultural habits of Bogotá's citizens: 43% attended a live concert in the past year, 11% engage in musical activities, and 10% regularly invest in digital music platforms. This vitality makes Bogotá an urban laboratory where music drives identity, mobility, and citizenship.

For this reason, the Music Cities Convention 2027, which will be held in Latin America for the first time, finds in Bogotá an ideal venue, supported by solid policies, an engaged citizenry, and well-coordinated institutions. This event will leave a lasting legacy in methodologies, international networks, and strategic alliances, consolidating the Colombian capital as a Global South hub for innovation and music management.

Festivales al Parque as a Tool for Promoting Cultural Rights

The Festivales al Parque are one of the clearest expressions of how Bogotá guarantees access to cultural rights. As free, large-scale, and decentralized events, they ensure that anyone, regardless of social or economic status, can access high-quality musical experiences.

As a sustained public policy for nearly three decades, this cycle of free and massive events guarantees that all citizens can enjoy music on equal terms. The figures speak for themselves: in 2024, Rock al Parque brought together more than 300,000 people, Salsa al Parque more than 105,000, and Hip Hop al Parque nearly 89,000. In 2025, Rock al Parque once again exceeded 250,000 attendees, with a key fact: 22.8% of participants came from outside the city, highlighting the impact of these festivals on cultural tourism and Bogotá's international projection.

Beyond massive attendance, the Festivales al Parque play a strategic role in the circulation of local and emerging artists by sharing stages with international groups, showcasing diverse genres, and connecting different territories. In addition, they integrate dimensions of sustainability (through the Eco-Festivals program and the partnership with the British Council), diversity and inclusion (with the participation of women, Afro-descendant and Indigenous communities, and LGBTQ+ groups in the programming), as well as citizen participation through workshops, business roundtables, and training activities. Taken together, this model makes Festivales al Parque an exemplary public policy of cultural democratization: these are spaces that promote coexistence, diversity, and mutual recognition, while closing gaps in access to music, strengthening intergenerational and territorial dialogue, and consolidating Bogotá as a city where music is both a right and a cornerstone of citizenship.

Final Reflections

In times of crisis, music is not a luxury or an accessory but a central element in the urban planning of creative and sustainable cities: it is a tool of advocacy and transformation with proven effects on emotional health, social cohesion, equity, and human development. Its practice strengthens collective identities, builds intercultural bridges, and contributes to more just and resilient societies.

The challenge for cultural and urban policies is to consolidate music ecosystems that:

- Promote diversity as a strategic value.
- Connect community-based initiatives with professional ones.
- Create equitable conditions for the creation, circulation, and enjoyment of music.

Cities that integrate music into their policies and programs not only enhance their cultural ecosystems but also build more supportive, creative communities that are better equipped to face contemporary challenges. Recovery through music requires political will, regulatory frameworks that recognize its value, and a firm commitment to diversity and universal access.

Ultimately, music is a powerful tool to imagine and build more humane, creative, and cohesive cities. Its social role is, at once, a right, an opportunity, and a shared responsibility.