



PERCEPTIONS



Re-imagining PERCEPTIONS in
sound, music & sonic media:
conversations across borders



Collaborative partners

African Community Centre. Musicians: Chief Amas, Victor Brox, Ify Iwobi, Debo Omole (Wales), Chris Obehi (Italy), Michael Mendoh (Cyprus)



Location

Swansea Grand Theatre Hub, Black History celebration event (28 October 2021) and Italy, Cyprus

Purpose/Aim



The purpose of this activity is to use sound, music and emotions they produce to reinvent dominant perceptions and migration narratives. Drawing on the findings from the PERCEPTIONS interviews, this activity re-constructs and mediates the topics of hope, faith, disorientation central to migrants' experiences and imaginations. It uses experimental approach to co-creation of electronic music, acoustic instrumentation, sound techniques and rhythms by musicians in Wales and Italy to enable a music conversation across borders. The activity builds on music and associated practices of listening, performance and distribution to re-envision spaces, times and processes of migration and socio-cultural contexts in which they emerge.



Audience

The audience involves artists, performers, migrant practitioners and 150 participants of the Black History celebration event in Swansea, as well as online participants in the PERCEPTIONS partner countries.



Description of the Activity

The activity deploys sound and music to develop experimental and collaborative accounts of the key migration-related themes and re-present migrant knowledges. It is organised around a music-centred event co-produced by the migrants connected across borders via an online (Zoom) platform. During the event, migrant and local musicians use sonic format to tell migration stories different to other (often textual and visual) media, particularly highlighting hidden, fleeting and taken-for-granted aspects of migrant lives. Live music performances mixed with pre-recorded music fragments open space for different voices and enable different modes of listening and responses. Apart from reflecting on the audible elements of migrants' journeys, music reveals their sensory engagements with everyday spaces and emotional resonances with their multiple 'home' countries.





Techniques

This activity is implemented in 3 phases.

1. Ideas capture and pre-recorded music. Migrant musicians in Wales and Italy are introduced to the findings from the PERCEPTIONS project and reflect on the themes of faith, (In)visibility, Disorientation, Loss, and Hope emerging from migrant interviews. In particular, they reflected on the sonic features of migrant journeys that produced distinctive ambiances and perceptions of places they traversed. Other media (such as images and interview texts) were used as complimentary to provide evocative interpretations of the above themes, and to help in developing poetic and creative lyrics for migrants' music. As a result, musicians composed new music recordings, simple videos of their songs and textual narratives describing connections with the migrant perceptions.

2. Participatory music making and improvisation. Live music event was held in Swansea's Grand Theatre Hub as a part of the Black History month celebrations, led by a variety of musicians from migrant background. Pre-recorded songs by musicians from Italy were played to stimulate sonic responses from Wales-based performers and the audience, encouraging a music "dialogue", improvisation across borders and re-making of migrant perceptions at different geographical scales. Online and in-situ audiences were invited to contribute, adding loud cheering, clapping and other sonic resonances to the sounds made by the artists.

3. Video capture and sharing. Video recordings of live performance and online sonic dialogue captured the embodied practice of music, reflecting non-verbal, immaterial and emotional elements of migrant journeys. These recordings reflected ambiances and acoustics of the places transited and inhabited by migrants, producing alternative sonic versions of perceptions and narratives of Europe beyond verbally articulated meanings. Live video performance was streamed on PERCEPTIONS Facebook account to make it accessible to the broader audience.



Outcomes

Outcomes of activity include a collection of pre-recorded songs (with artists narrations contextualising, discussing and explaining sonic material), video and audio recordings of live music performance on the topics central to the PERCEPTIONS project (faith, (In)visibility, Disorientation, Loss, and Hope). Audio recordings will be linked to specific locations and uploaded to create a virtual map. Edited videos of artists performing songs and sonic improvisation will be shared on the PERCEPTIONS platform and its social media (Twitter, Facebook, YouTube accounts). Videos will also be used for practical and technical training that cover participatory, experimental recording and listening techniques. Audio recordings will also form a part of a mobile exhibition on Sanctuary and migration (with Swansea City of Sanctuary) displayed across Wales.



Key Concepts

Perception – exploring perceptions of Wales and Europe as complex, more-than-textual, multi-sensory constructions, which produce different narratives (as phonography) and reveal migrants' diverse relationships to place. Practices of music recording, listening, playback and performance highlight everyday, invisible and taken-for-granted elements of migrants' perceptions, which are not seen as a source of valid knowledge and often get overlooked by policy-makers and practitioners. Immersive, intimate and moving (sound as a form of movement) representations of migrant journeys expose hidden features of migration systems, insecurities, bureaucracies and invite different ways of knowing places of hospitality and welcome.

Experimentation as an opportunity to revisit existing practices of producing migrant knowledge. Combination of participatory music-making and sonic dialogue across borders not only created new knowledge, but also offered ways of seeing familiar approaches anew. Online conversations, participant response and music improvisation unsettled accepted codes, rules and constraints framing collective production of migration awareness materials. Experimentation helped to produce new queries about migrants' perceptions (often indeterminate and initiated in the process of creating making) and consider potential practical and policy responses that can be more effective in reaching relevant audiences.

Comparing narratives – exposing the racialized, historical, gendered cultural context in which the production of migration narratives and enactment of migration policies take place. Music-making as a collective action during the Black History month celebrations raised questions about the agency of non-White migrants in challenging racialised migration narratives and repressive trappings of ideological and legalistic migration regimes.

Impact



Collaborative and responsive nature of music-making, that brings together individual and collective action in improvisation, can help migrants to achieve specific social goals around inclusion, empowerment, recognition and community involvement. This approach gives migrants an opportunity to express themselves in creative ways, developing not only their music skills, but also improving social competencies and offering supportive ways of learning. Development of the joint community event involving different creative practitioners helped to identify motivations, material resources, feelings and concerns, as well as develop new ways (changing values) of consensus-building, collective expression, feedback and decision-making.

This community event developed creative collaborations between established and amateur music artists, as well as forged cultural partnerships within local neighbourhoods. Collective music-making and improvisation helped to design and practice techniques for maximising diversity and collective creativity, which will be shared in future events developing community cohesion. Contribution from international artists, who do not usually have a chance to play or struggle to find their place in the established music field, also added liveliness, creativity to the existing cultural scene. Recorded videos of the event helped to challenge stereotypes, raise awareness about alternative migrant perceptions of Europe, and promote cultural identities and intercultural dialogue.



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