

Networks and Music Scenes. The case of México City Metropolitan Area.

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The identification of aestheticized urban districts with alternative and indie music scenes, and broadly with creative economic clusters is a simplification of an economic and cultural process that takes place at a larger geographical scale, say the metropolitan region and not at the level of an urban district. Urban districts are a component of larger systems that include diverse consumers of different social classes and tastes as well as many places not as glamorous or trendy as hip neighborhoods. These other urban areas and those that produce or consume cultural products in those areas tend to be obscured, dismissed and ultimately forgotten from the reconstruction of the music or creative scenes, because of their social marginality or spatial periphery. Revealing the spatial distribution of patterns of creative clusters within the urban space is relevant for better informed urban and local development policies. Recently, in Mexico City urban strategies have adopted the discourse of regenerating areas and promoting economic growth through the formation of “Creative districts”. These interventions missed the central point that we want to argue here: The spatial scope of creative clusters are metropolitan; they are hardly contained in one urban district and a network governing approach is in need. Promoting these activities by focusing on one urban district is erroneous and affects the development of those firms, workers, and related organizations not located in these zones; in particular, these policies affect the viability of peripheral areas which contribute to the overall functioning of the creative clusters and are in need of attention for urban and economic development policies.

In order to sustain this argument this research reconstructs the alternative music scene through the mapping of Mexico City's bands touring the city in a two year period. A random stratified sampling of the bands was taken resulting in a group of 161 bands. Each band's gigs agenda for 2012 to 2014 was registered, recording the name, type and location of each venue in Mexico City's metropolitan Area . The information obtained allowed us to map the venues and to construct a social network matrix to analyze the structural components and weight of the venues in the network.

The data certainly shows that the functional dimension of the live music infrastructure created and used by the bands in the alternative scene in Mexico City takes place at the metropolitan scale. However, very few of these venues will make a mark on authoritative narrations and memoirs of music leading observers; yet, those venues, occasional and permanent, small and big, play its part in the subsistence of a healthy music scene. Venues left out of this recounts cannot be diminished as unimportant. The relevance of a system of venues in sustaining a music scene is better understood if pictured as a complex system in which the whole is more than the parts. The continued life of a scene in a large metropolis hardly can be the outcome of few and lonely gatekeepers strategic programming but the simultaneous interdependent yet uncoordinated programming of hundreds of venues.

In relation to venues' intraurban location patterns is clear that the places where the bands played are located in a wide diversity of neighborhoods within the city that have different socioeconomic and cultural profiles; both central and peripheral, high income as well as low income neighborhoods, hip-bohemian districts and working class districts, mainstream middle-class neighborhoods as well as cultural alternative districts. This diversity of spaces confront the prevalent representation of La Roma-Condesa district in Mexico City as the core of the alternative scene in terms of being the place of this music aesthetic creativity and innovation, and for the association of the district demographics and consumption culture with the scene.

In terms of public intervention for supporting and promoting a local music scene, we found a large involvement of public administered spaces as occasional music venues. This is a form of public support of the

scene inasmuch as it creates work opportunities and gives exposure to the bands. However, this process happens in a sort of spontaneous and fragmented way, if this could be strategically organized it can create a relevant government public policy for bands. We can think of open calls for gigs, or seasons of touring the city, etc. all based on certain criteria that can encompass both opportunities for new bands, as well as support for growing hot bands. The use of public money expenditure on music for live concerts is already in place, but should be organized and discussed to have a larger impact.

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