

# El Sistema Venezuela in Graz



Transcription of the  
**Podium Discussion**  
of the  
**El Sistema Venezuela**  
Visit at the  
University of Music and  
Performing Arts Graz

## Panelists:

**Dr Eduardo Mendez**

*Executive Director of El Sistema Venezuela*

**Franka Verhagen**

*Director of the Academic training program for teachers and conductors of El Sistema*

**Walter Gutdeutsch**

*Music pedagogue, pianist, philosopher and humanist*

**Dr Christine Rhomberg**

*Managing Director at Hilti Foundation*

**Leila Weber**

*Guest teacher in Sistema Venezuela and Founder of Hangarmusik Berlin, Sistema-inspired program*

**Dr Bernhard Gritsch**

*Dean of studies at the University of Music and Performing Arts Graz*

**Dr Elisabeth Freismuth**

*Rector at the University of Music and Performing Arts Graz*

**Maria Majno**

*Pianist, Philosopher and musicologist, founder of El Sistema Italia, Vice-president of El Sistema Europe*

**Dr Ulrike Gelbmann**

*Global Studies and social sustainability, Karl-Franzens University*

**Moderation: Bruno Campo**

**Rector Elisabeth Freismuth:**

So, good morning everybody, it's really a great moment, many of you don't know me, my name is Elisabeth Freismuth, I'm currently rector at the University of Music and Performing Arts. Just to give you a few impressions of the university: this is the oldest music university in Austria, so very fond of being older than Vienna, and that's why we celebrated more than one year, from 2016 to 2017, because we were founded 200 years ago. And the incredible thing is what we try to do, is to combine tradition with innovation, because our roots go back to those influenced by Schubert and Beethoven, because one of the co-founders was a very close friend to Schubert and Beethoven, so this is the tradition where we came from. On the other side we are really very, very good and prove high excellency in contemporary music, so this is really a large line from tradition to innovation. And there is one issue that personally – and I have to say from the bottom of my heart – is so important for me, and that is the responsibility of university for society. Legally there is the University Act, and paragraph one of this University Act, which dates back to 2004, says, that universities have to contribute to solve the problems of society. And that was just a line in an Act, and we said “ok, we are responsible for society, so, but let's do what we really have to do: we have to teach we have to make research, we have to develop the arts”. But now in the 21<sup>st</sup> century things have very much changed, and not only looking into other continents and countries, but looking right and left in Europe, and Europe is a very small continent. And so we do have so many problems in our neighbour countries, in our own countries; I just refer to the migration situation now, so many refugees coming to Europe from totally different cultures, totally different religions. So we were standing there and saying “what do we do?”, and we don't want to be just good people and help, we want to do something which is really sustainable. And if you regard a university as one of the highest institutions within a society, within a state, within the Republic of Austria, we really have to take this responsibility into our hands and have to prove that we are able to make the right decisions for the future. And one, I think, of these important right steps of our university was – and I want to mention Bruno Campo, because the idea goes back to him, and I'm really very fond, because it's not normal that strategic decisions start from the idea of a student knocking at the door of the rector, and it was really that situation: “I'm Bruno Campo, I have an idea”. And out of this idea we became a member of Sistema Europe, and out of this idea I do hope – and I'm sure, because we do have so many wonderful people working here and so many beautiful students working here – that out of this idea, we will develop and deepen what we do for El Sistema, but as well, we will develop new ideas in other fields. And if I said develop other fields, I just want to mention that we are also working and collaboration very intensely with Superar. We do have schools, elementary schools, in the city of Graz with more than 80% of people coming from abroad, and not from Great Britain and the US, but really from countries in need, and we collaborate with a couple of institutions here, prisons, hospitals, elderly people, blind people, deaf people, and this is not just because we are so good and nice, but because we know and we are deeply convinced, that what we see and feel in all these situations will change our personal insight and will change our attitude as teachers, as artists, as scientists. And that was the main reason why when Bruno came again and said that there was the idea of inviting El Sistema, because you [El Sistema] are now here in Austria, that I said “Yes, we do it”. And we do it because it is a need to do it, and we are convinced that it is our duty and it is also our heart blood to do something, and if we want to do something we want to do it as sustainable projects. So, thank you very much for coming, I think the panel will be presented by Bruno Campo, who did a lot of work in the last days, thank you very, very much.

Thousands of emails were arriving here and there, and I think it's great that so many people are working on that project within the university. Thank you for coming [to audience], and all our guests who came from Venezuela, enjoy Graz, it's really a very, very pretty city, with very Italian flavours and southern style here, wonderful food, wonderful drinking, wonderful people, so please take home many of these impressions to your home country, and I'm very, very sure that this will be a beautiful start of a wonderful collaboration and cooperation. Thank you for being here.

**Bruno Campo:**

Good morning everyone, I have the honour of presenting our panellists today, as I was saying before, for me it's really a great inspiration to have so wonderful people around, definitely the people that makes the world better and that moves the world in the right direction every day, and this is really an honour.

First I would like to introduce **Dr Eduardo Mendez**, the executive director of El Sistema. He started as a member of El Sistema during his childhood, playing violin in a *nucleo* in Mérida. Eduardo later became a violinist of the Simón Bolívar Orchestra, a teacher and a mentor. He developed quickly his management abilities and took important roles inside the organization since 2003, passing through the Academic Division and leading the National Direction of *Nucleos*. In 2008, Maestro José Antonio Abreu entrusted him with the Executive Direction of "El Sistema". Apart from his responsibilities by supervising the development of the infrastructure with new buildings and halls in the country and selecting and identifying the different ensembles from the whole institution, Eduardo considers this to be his main objective: To keep the structural stability of the El Sistema organization, which includes more than 10,000 employees, designing and implementing strategies with agreements between diverse organizations, to increase the social inclusion and to guarantee the musical excellence. Under his leadership El Sistema has reached 1 million kids and youngsters recently, and we are very happy to hear that.

Eduardo, I would like to ask a question to all of you to start this discussion, and it is basically: What has been your experience with El Sistema and what is outstanding about El Sistema in your point of view?

**Dr Eduardo Mendez:**

Well, good morning everyone, thank you for being here, it's an honour – as I mentioned before to the rector – for us and for Venezuela to be here in this important university. Well, I think El Sistema has what I can identify as innovation. What Maestro Abreu made when he started this in 1975, he was just standing against the traditional way of teaching and of learning music. He was a person who wanted to give the right of music to everyone possible, and of course I think this is for us the most outstanding thing. Of course there are many technical issues during the years, we can talk later about different programs, the different kinds of music we play, the number of children, but the real important thing is to give the opportunity to play music, to have social inclusion, to give the children a new way to see their life, the opportunity to become better citizens, and of course all this is connected with the musical excellence that is the main objective of all of this.

**Bruno Campo:**

**Franka Verhagen**, director of the academic training program for teachers and conductors of El Sistema since 2010. Guitarist and pedagogue from the Netherlands, moved to Venezuela in

1996 and has been teaching since then in many *nucleos* and in the Conservatorio Simón Bolívar as well. In 2015 she was appointed member of the Music Academic Council of El Sistema by Maestro José Antonio Abreu.

The same question to you, dear Franka: What has been your experience with El Sistema and what's outstanding about it in your point of view?

**Franka Verhagen:**

Good morning, an honour to take part of this wonderful panel. Well, outstanding in El Sistema is the inclusion, the inclusion for all children and young people who want to take part. There is no obstacle to go and get to a *nucleo* in any part of the country, we have been able to open *nucleos* in every state, in every big city, and even in most of the small villages, so it's an open place and by Venezuelan society it is an institution. People, even though they are not musicians or don't have children, they know about El Sistema, everyone knows about El Sistema, so that is remarkable to have been able to make such a big structure that is part of the culture of the country. And well, my experience, I have been very fortunate to be able to take part of this process all along 32 years now.

**Bruno Campo:**

**Walter Gutdeutsch**, pianist, conductor, pedagogue and philosopher, graduated in the Music University of Vienna. Walter was Director of the Music School in Pullach near Munich until 2004. Since 2002, he has been a jury member of the International Piano Competition Delia Steinberg in Madrid, and since 2008 also its artistic director. Since 1998 Walter Gutdeutsch has been giving talks, workshops and seminars with topics around global music pedagogy, culture-philosophy and life-long learning. He is collaborating with music schools, conservatories, music universities, kindergartens, primary and secondary schools as well as other educational, pedagogic or cultural institutions, working with pupils, students and teachers on three continents. He is a philosopher and humanist, member of Treffpunkt Philosophie, Neue Akropolis Graz.

Dear Walter, what has been your experience with El Sistema, and what is outstanding about El Sistema in your point of view?

**Walter Gutdeutsch:**

I met Bruno in 2009 or 2010 when he invited me to come to Guatemala, and there I worked with the teachers and conductors in his music school, where he had the two orchestras, the children's orchestra and the youth orchestra which he founded in Guatemala after meeting Abreu in Venezuela, so he founded El Sistema in Guatemala. And I worked with your teachers and I was totally impressed by the enthusiasm, and I talked to you about this many times. We have here in middle Europe, especially Austria, Germany (I'm German), and Switzerland, and Denmark and so, we have an enormous education system of music in our primary and secondary schools, and also music schools, and this is kind of formalized, kind of with stereotypes of teachings, and we in Europe maybe sometimes confound or mix up musicality or the love of music with knowledge of music. So we think we are not musical because we don't know how to read notes. And when I make seminars here in Europe it's always the question when we make some improvisation groups with adults or with children, nobody dares to play because they think "oh, I'm not musical", but when I'm making seminars in Latin America or in Turkey or in Israel or wherever, they go: "ah, I want, I want!". So this is a pure joy of sharing values through music. And the second thing I have noticed with El

Sistema, is that they play as if something is behind them, something which is kind of a necessity. When we play in a concert in the music schools (I was music school director near Munich), you know, you come in and then you play and then you make a bow and they applaud, and you sit down and then comes the next..., but when I heard El Sistema, the children and the youth, and the teachers talking and working with the children... it is what Abreu said with “tocar y luchar” [play and fight], to create a better world and to create better people, because we need better people to create a better world. And we have maybe lost this in Europe. And that is why I’m very thankful to be here.

**Bruno Campo:**

**Dr Christine Rhomberg:** Born in Austria, Christine has always been devoted to Art. She has been Head of Development of the Lucerne Festival, Head of Marketing of the Bregenz Festival and Project Manager and Curator in the Kunsthhaus Bregenz. Since 2012, Dr Rhomberg is the Managing Director of the Hilti Foundation, responsible for the project portfolio in the fields of education, culture and science. The Hilti Foundation has been working with El Sistema Venezuela, and through the years Dr Rhomberg has reinforced a strong vision on “social change through music” in Europe and South America, focusing on sustainable teacher’s training as well as on the collaboration between the programs. A great supporter of Sinfonía por el Perú and other programs in Chile and Bolivia, as well as Superar Vienna and Zürich, and the Sistema Europe Youth Orchestra, which is the platform that unifies the spirit of El Sistema, gathering young musicians from over 28 European countries every summer. Christine Rhomberg and the Hilti Foundation have had a unique role establishing El Sistema all over the world. Without her support, many Sistema-inspired programs would definitely look very different or simply not exist. Thank you for being here, Christine. What is your experience in El Sistema and what is outstanding about it for you?

**Dr Christine Rhomberg:**

Well, first of all thank you for having me here and good morning to everybody. My first experience with El Sistema was during my time at the Lucerne Festival, and I was really impressed by the energy and I can underline what you said [to Walter Gutdeutsch]; it is a completely different approach. In the meantime, El Sistema for me has become much more than a program, it has become a philosophy, and I think many of you might not know that worldwide we have an enormous number of what we today call Sistema-inspired programs, and this is really for me the outstanding thing with El Sistema, how the idea of an individual man like José Antonio Abreu can spread all over the world. What our job is now as the Hilti Foundation, and I hope many others will join us, is to create awareness for this fact. There is so much going on which we in middle Europe do not even know. There has been a mapping just recently by a foundation in Vienna, and they were mapping Community Arts Projects by asking 10 people at the beginning, they mentioned their five best practice-models, and they again talked to these five best practice models and they ended up with more than 2,800 Community Arts Projects worldwide, without doing a strong focus for example on Asia, so there is much more around. What our job is now, is first of all to let the individual institutions know about each other, because everyone looks like that [closed view] and doesn’t look left and right, because everybody is overwhelmed with their own work. There is a lot of potential around by connecting the institutions, and I think we can create an even bigger and more intense world of El Sistema. And the second thing is, we want to build bridges. We want to

build bridges especially between the Sistema-inspired initiatives and the established musical world; orchestras as well as educational institutions, and I'm very impressed and I'm very happy to hear about what the university here in Graz is already doing and starting and trying to achieve. And I think El Sistema is an initiative that really can change the world, but we have to know about it. Everybody in Venezuela knows, but we in Europe we still have a lot to do to create this awareness.

**Bruno Campo:**

**Leila Weber** studied Viola in the Music University Hanns-Eisler Berlin. She is the winner of many string quartet competitions, and she has played with the Gustav Mahler Jugendorchester, Konzerthaus Orchester Berlin, and the Berliner Philharmoniker. Since 2008, Leila has worked closely with El Sistema in Venezuela where she regularly appears as a guest artist. Inspired and motivated by El Sistema Venezuela, Leila founded the Hangarmusik program in Berlin, where refugees and children from diverse sectors of Berlin gather to play in an orchestra all together.

What has been your experience and what is outstanding for you about El Sistema?

**Leila Weber:**

Good morning everybody, I'm happy to be here today. I had the big luck to be in Venezuela in 2008 and to get to know the everyday life in the *nucleos* and in the orchestras. And about my experience, it took some time to create an orchestra here. In 2015 we had the situation that many refugees came to Europe and also to Germany, to Berlin, and in the former airport "Tempelhof" there were 3,000 refugees, 1,000 children. And in this moment we started to think, that we had to create a new society for these children coming from different countries to Germany, and we started to create a children's orchestra, with different conditions.

**Bruno Campo:**

**Dr Bernhard Gritsch** is associate professor of music education, dean of studies and chair of the curriculum committee of music education at the University of Music and Performing Arts Graz. He majored in Music Education and French, earned his doctorate in 1996 and his habilitation in 2004. He has taught at several European universities and has been lecturer at many national and international training and further education seminars, conferences and symposia on music education. He has published leading text books for classroom teaching in Austria and Germany. His research interests include teacher's training (structures, contents, outcomes and evaluation), classroom teaching and research, multimedia design of teaching material and studies on transfer effects of musical training.

What do you consider outstanding about El Sistema in your point of view?

**Dr Bernhard Gritsch:**

Good morning everybody. I have a second hand experience with El Sistema, I'm not directly involved. Sure, I attended many symposia and conferences and I studied the material which can be found on the web about El Sistema, but I'm not directly involved in El Sistema, and I think it's not my role. My role is, as I understood you, Bruno, is to think creatively how we could implement the initiative and the ideas of El Sistema in an Austrian school system, in primary and secondary schools, and how we could implement it in the curricula of let's say performing studies, pedagogical studies. There I can give you some information about it.

**Bruno Campo:**

**Dr Elisabeth Freismuth**, our rector in the University of Performing Arts Graz. She was born in Vienna, studied Law, History and Art History, and has a doctorate in Law. She was Director of the University of Music and Performing Arts Vienna between 1990 and 2008, President of the "Friends of the Vienna Film Academy" and member of the Board of Trustees of the Arnold Schönberg Center. From 2008 to 2014 she was Director General at the Federal Ministry of Science, Research and Economy. Since October 2014 she is Rector of the University of Music and Performing Arts Graz. She has received the "Austrian Golden Order of Merit for Services", and the "Austrian Cross of Honour for Science and Art" awards. A huge supporter of the students in university and their initiatives, which include sending a delegation of students from our university to join the Sistema Europe Youth Orchestra last august in Athens. And by own experience I can say, very open to students and very supportive. Thank you for being here, Dr Freismuth.

**Dr Elisabeth Freismuth:**

Thank you very much. I already said something in the beginning, I don't want to repeat, but what I forgot to say before, is that a couple of weeks ago we had a conference of the European rectors of all the universities and we had a leadership seminar for the rectors, and we were discussing the issues which in our opinion are the most important ones now for the university leaders. And we found out two: One is solidarity as the common language of the European universities of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, and the second is values. And I'm talking about basic values such as freedom and openness and so on and so on. And I think this important project of El Sistema touches very much these issues and fits perfectly into what we as universities should do, we should be not only door openers but eye openers for so many questions and for these issues going on in the world. What we also discussed is that we should not only give answers to the questions which raise in a society like now, but we should also be one step ahead, sorry, we shouldn't give answers, we should raise the right questions ahead, because we have so many well trained people working, so much intellectual potential within the university, so we as universities always have to be one step before others and looking to all the problems of the world. So I think these two ideas I brought back: solidarity within people, universities and society, and values are ideas which seem to be very important also in this discussion. Thank you.

**Bruno Campo:**

**Maria Majno**, a pianist, philosopher and musicologist graduated in Milan. During her extensive tenure as Artistic and Executive Director at the Società del Quartetto di Milano (the oldest concert society in Italy, founded in 1864) she realized a number of thematically based seasons and the complete performance of Bach's sacred and secular Cantatas presented for the first time with the intersecting criteria of chronological development, logical programming and interpretive diversity, which got her the Premio Abbiati in the year 2000. Since 2002, Maria is active in the International Association "European Mozart Ways". In addition to her involvement in the musical and cultural fields, Maria Majno pursues her engagement in other non-profit ventures such as the programming coordination of the Mariani Foundation for Paediatric Neurology, of which she is vicepresident since 2010. Maria Majno actually teaches at Università Cattolica in Milan, Music Management and Economics. Her eclectic experience in the issues of music, and in the wider context of social integration, has led to her appointment in the leadership of the national project "Sistema italiano delle

orchestre e cori giovanili e infantili” which was launched by Maestro Claudio Abbado for Italy on the example of the Venezuelan Sistema model. Maria Majno also represents Italy in the Sistema Europe Network where she is a member of the board, as well as being on the Advisory Board of Sistema Global. I can say by own experience, that Maria has been a great support and one of the motors of the Sistema Europe Youth Orchestra, gathering around 300 young musicians every summer in the last 5 years.

Maria, what has been your experience with El Sistema and what do you consider is outstanding about it?

**Maria Majno:**

Well, I think our work both in Italy and in the Sistema Europe network starts where Christine mentioned: in building bridges and creating awareness. We do implement the program in Italy where there was a lot of *nucleos* working rather independently from each other, so one of the targets of this meeting for me is to think about what is common between the projects, because we know so well what is different about them, we are very rooted in each environment, we have to correspond to the needs of each place where we work, but we also have to think about what joins us, so I think I would give this as one of the targets of our conversation. What is outstanding for me is perhaps above all the generosity. Because I think that all of us who come from music think we have received so much from music and we feel the urge to give it back, and El Sistema is for me the greatest model of how each of us can work out our way of giving back the values and the riches of music. So the same way that El Sistema has put at our disposal all their conquest, even sometimes the trial and error in figuring out what works well and what could work even better, so this connection between us and them which they do just out of sharing and the attitude of sharing and the generosity, and thinking that music never stops being an added value, the way we call it with the kids “an extra gear in life”, so that is how we feel about it.

**Bruno Campo:**

And finally, **Dr Ulrike Gelbmann** works at the Institute of Systems Science, Innovation and Sustainability Research at the University of Graz, the Karl-Franzens University. She is an expert in Sustainability Research and Waste Management. Furthermore, she is chair of the Curricula Commission of the master’s study programme “Global Studies”, which will host an IP about El Sistema. For three Interdisciplinary Practical Trainings (“IP”) (IP Restl-Festl 2014, IP Sustainability Groups in Graz 2014/15 and IP Global T-Shirt 2017) she has been awarded several teaching prizes, including Teaching Award of the University of Graz 2015 and 2017, she was short listed for the national teaching award, Ars Docendi 2016, furthermore together with Martina Friesenbichler she was awarded the Energy Globe Styria 2015 and the State Prize for Food Loss Prevention, Viktualia in 2015, currently they are both nominated for the Ars Docendi 2018.

What is your experience with El Sistema, and what do you consider is outstanding about it?

**Dr Ulrike Gelbmann:**

Thank you, Bruno, thanks for having us here, and you must all think “what does this woman do there, she’s not a musician”. My first experience with El Sistema was back in I think 2004 or 2005. I heard a piece by Beethoven, the third movement of his 7<sup>th</sup> Symphony, played by the Bolívars [Simón Bolívar Orchestra] and a very young Gustavo Dudamel, and I was really astonished and amazed and ever since I have been a great fan of both the Bolívars and



Gustavo and of course of El Sistema. And it took us 10 years or so to get really into the matter so much, and you heard that we have done lots of programs trying to raise people's awareness of sustainability, and I was very happy that rector Freismuth mentioned the values before that El Sistema might represent. We're experts in sustainability and in global education, and if you read about the values of global education it's tolerance, solidarity, equality, justice, inclusion, cooperation and non-violence, and then you can hear that the topics that they address are global justice, human rights, environmental sustainability, peace, intercultural communication. Isn't El Sistema an absolutely outstanding example for all of that? So that's the reason why we will try to investigate it a little bit from our scientific point of view, which is not a musical one, but a cultural one or a sustainability one. Thank you.

**Bruno Campo:**

So having introduced our panellists I would simply like to open basically with a question for everyone, maybe Eduardo to start. What are those values of El Sistema, what is this thing that can be transferable into different societies, into different cultures, that is unique and global at the same time that can be an element for applying El Sistema in different countries in the world? And I open to discussion.

**Dr Eduardo Mendez:**

Well, I think music is the key. When we talk about music, we are talking about passion, we are talking about doing things from the heart, and El Sistema is like this. I mean, when you go into a *nucleo* and you are very young – and I can say by own experience, I was almost 7 years old when my mom took me to the *nucleo*, and immediately I got a violin – a small one – I liked the violin, so... Next day I was in my first workshop with 6 other kids around my age getting to know how to play the violin, but in that moment I felt like I wasn't alone, there were other children playing, making mistakes, some of them playing better than the others because of course they had more time learning the instrument, and it's fun because the same children come to you and help you how to play. So then you start by osmosis, you don't know how, but you get from them this solidarity. And then you have to go to the general rehearsal and you are with a bunch of kids, like I don't know 50-60 of them in the children's orchestra. And there is a guy called "conductor" that is like a teacher for you, because you don't know anything about this, and this guy stops or gives the key to play or asks someone to do something, and everyone has to be quiet, because if not you don't understand what he is saying. So then you start to understand what discipline means, and it's not because your mom said something to you, it's because if you don't do it, then you are out of the group, and you are not a part of that group, because the rest of the children will come against you because you are not helping in what you are doing. If you are not prepared also if you don't practice enough you are not in the level of the group, so the music won't sound the same way. And one of the most important things that maestro Abreu always said, and it's something that remains in every *nucleo* in Venezuela, is the quality. When you go to a *nucleo* in Venezuela you have to do and you have to give the best from you, and that's what the teachers ask you to do, because in our methodology the teacher is always with you. You go 6 days a week to every *nucleo*, 4 hours, so it's not that the charge of the learning is necessarily on the children, the charge of the learning is also sharing the day by day with the teacher, so in a way you practice guided by your teacher every day, because you are in the workshop every day. And he can really help you when you are making mistakes, with the position, with something you are doing wrong with the technique or anything, he helps you immediately, so

it doesn't allow for you to go home and keep making the mistake the whole week until you see your teacher again. So you also learn that this is a kind of family, because you see them every day, you see your teachers every day, and your teachers always ask you "Hey, are you sad today, what happened, do you have a problem?" "Yes, my mom is sick" or something, "Well maybe we can help your mom. What does she need?" So then the structure of the *nucleo* is much more than a music school, it's like a community centre. So that's why El Sistema since the year 2000 has become a public policy of the state, because it's much more than only a centre to teach music, it's like a community centre, so there you can really learn true music and the real meaning of music which is the only thing that can put together so many people doing the same thing. You can really learn different values, as you mentioned, you mentioned many of those, and you are very good informed about all this, but definitely solidarity, definitely discipline, definitely team-work is very important there, because the base of El Sistema is not individual, it's the group. So you grow as a group, and when you listen to the orchestra, you mentioned that you listened to Beethoven 7<sup>th</sup> Symphony played by Simón Bolívar Orchestra with Gustavo Dudamel. Maybe they were like 25 years old in average at that time, and you don't hear an orchestra made by people who come and rehears, they are rehearsing together since they are 12 years old, so they breathe and they understand what the other one wants, even Gustavo, when the conductor comes and he lifts the hand everyone knows what he wants, because they know each other as a family for many years. And that's what El Sistema means, everyone in the *nucleo* plays together, goes together, and even they party together, because it's a big family. So these values are for us very important, because when you think about it, the music put them all on the same page, and helped them to keep going with their lives, and of course improving their quality every day, because it's the most important. Maestro Abreu always said that when you give the children the opportunity to do something different that perhaps the life asked for them, and you give them a violin or an instrument, and you give them the opportunity to be better, and then that is not only the moment of process, because if you then teach, or you allow them to be not their best, then they won't get the result of being redeemed by the music. Because when that happens, they feel that they are able to do good things, when they are able to play the best when they go to the stage and get the recognition from everyone there, and it only happens when they do their best. That's why our orchestras go to the Musikverein or the Konzerthaus or wherever and they get standing ovations, not because they are coming from a social program, it's because they come from there but they do good music. So the idea is to play with the rules, but doing it until their best. It's not that they are like poor refugees so we have a music program to help them to be happy during the afternoons, it's that they have to play good music, and there is where the children get the self-esteem of being a better person, a better citizen, and there is where the cycle finishes. So I think that this is for me one of the most important things about El Sistema.

**Dr Christine Rhomberg:**

I had another example from one of our programs which impressed me really very much. We have an academy in Colombia which is called the Academia Filarmónica Iberoamericana, it's a program that started originally in Colombia, it's an education program working on the university level with children mainly coming from "La Red", which is the Sistema-inspired program in the city of Medellin, and we have now opened this academy to other countries because we realized that there is need for example for regular teachers training. When you sit in a music school up at 4,000 meters in the Andes in Peru and you have no access to

regular training because there is no internet, and there is nothing which guarantees you that you as a teacher can develop regularly. So we identified the needs and then we opened this academy in Colombia, and now invite regularly the teachers and the highly talented young musicians to come there. And out of this academy an orchestra has developed, it was recently on tour in Switzerland and Austria, and when they arrived, they told me about the preparation for this tour, and the tour was called “gira de gratitud”, so “tour of gratefulness”, and they explained me the three values which they really communicated and lived day by day, and this is first of all excellence. Excellence you would say a musician, ok that’s normal, but it is excellence in whatever you do, it is excellence in how you deal with your neighbour in the orchestra, it is excellence in how you deal with your parents, with your teachers, so it’s about being as good as possible and as dedicated as possible. The second thing is generosity, because you have to be ready to share what you have learned through the academy and through your teachers and whoever it is who helps you. You have to be able to share and to help, and this is what Eduardo described in a very good way, this is how teaching functions in El Sistema, the younger are helped by the older and more experienced ones, and they are generous and open enough, not thinking about themselves like we do it in many things in our ego-oriented world, but they share and by sharing they achieve a much better quality. And the third thing is gratitude. Gratitude because behind everything you get in the program there is somebody else, there is a teacher, there are parents who make it possible, there is maybe somebody who is paying for it, etc., and to create awareness for the students about all this is important so that they can multiply it; if they experience the generosity of their neighbour in the orchestra they will pass it on. And I think beyond many, many values which Eduardo already mentioned, I think it’s so important to create this understanding for collaboration, and this is something which we have to think about here in Europe, that it is not about us as egos. It was the same in the speech of Maestro Abreu in 2013 in Salzburg when he said that classical music is no longer a social luxury, classical music is something for everybody, music in general, and I think this is what we have to make happen here in Europe.

**Franka Verhagen:**

Yes, I wanted to continue about the teachers training. I have had the honour to develop, with my colleagues, a program in El Sistema Venezuela, because we are all teachers in El Sistema. Right now we created a new scale in our institution: we are all educators, whether we are conductors for choirs, conductors for orchestras, whether we are working with luthiers, whether we are working with special needs kids, with hospitals, etc. Our preparation for the teachers includes several components, obviously we all have to be first of all excellent musicians to be able to teach our instrument or teach some specific discipline within music. But also we have to know how to transfer this knowledge in a very creative way, we have to be able to adapt to any situation, any environment, any infrastructure, we have to be able to work with enough children. I remember once there was a conductor just visiting us doing a masterclass for student conductors, and in a break there was one of the students for conducting, he is one of the main horn players of the Simón Bolívar Orchestra, and he took his horn and was playing a bit, and then small students of the children’s orchestra were just looking through the door, they came with their horns and they sat next to this, for them famous, admired horn player, and they started to blow with him, like imitating what he was doing, and he was ok with it and he started immediately to teach although it was not his teaching moment. And this conductor was so amazed and said: “and he just allowed those kids to sit next to him”, and I said: “yes, of course, I mean, what’s the problem?”. I think we

have to start thinking out of the box, being flexible, creative and not to be too formal, to be always open to give, what we have already said about generosity, it's that actually, we don't mind when we are all together just to create one big idea. And then of course that is the pedagogical part, but there is also the managing part, because all our musicians, all our teachers, all our conductors we are constantly working towards a result, and not a result within two months or a year, we are working towards results next week or within three days, because the activity is so intense, 6 days a week. In 6 days you can prepare perfectly a repertoire, and it can be played, and all kids can be involved, those who are already playing 4 years long, and those who just started two days ago. Those who started two days ago will play open strings, but we include them, and that's the motivating way that the children really feel immediately involved.

**Bruno Campo:**

What you are saying is something we spoke about before with Bernhard, and that brings us to the point of the two realities between the programs. As you mentioned we have so many hours per day, it's clear, also in Guatemala it was clear, that it was such an inclusion, meaning that those kids are outside in the streets doing nothing and in fact getting negative opportunities, so then we take them. In Europe it's slightly different, because there are opportunities around, so we have basically rethought this concept more in terms of integration. We were speaking about it a little bit, Bernhard, what do you say?

**Dr Bernhard Gritsch:**

Thank you very much. I think 6 days, 4 hours that you get the children, that's in Europe I think a little bit different. So I see two problems let's say, if you look at the society in the industrial, developed countries. The first is the plurality of offerings which we face. Let's say our children on Monday are playing football, on Tuesday they are playing volleyball, on Wednesday they are taking an instrumental lesson, on Thursday they are riding and on Friday they are playing computer games together or whatever, so this leads – and I deplore this development in our westerns countries – this leads to a Latin proverb that I like very much: “In omnia aliquid, in total nihil”: We are doing always a little bit from everything, but we do not focus on things, we are not working precisely, and we are not deepening our understanding, our knowledge, our skills, and the result is nothing, “In total nihil”. So that's one thing which is... I think El Sistema could be a very good counterpoint in musical terms to this development, so that we come back – as the famous Swiss philosopher Bieri said, one of the main characteristics of musical education, “*musikalische Bildung*”, is precision – and to lead back the children to focus on less things and not doing all the plurality, and I think El Sistema could be a good contribution to a change in this social development which I deplore very much. The second thing is the time. You know that, let's say, in the Austrian school system pupils are in schools, and they are in primary schools from 8am to high noon or 1pm, in secondary schools from 8am to 1.30pm, and then the afternoon care starts, so it would be very important for initiatives like El Sistema to come into the schools. So that's very important in my thinking.

**Bruno Campo:**

Thank you. For the ones that has already experience in adapting the El Sistema-spirit in Europe?

**Maria Majno:**

Well, I think it's a very good stimulation in that respect. We tried in our environment in Lombardy, which is one of the largest and more affluent regions, to bring it into the school during the school time, and try to really involve everybody. For a year we tried that in a couple of schools, and at the same time we tried to do it after school hours in another place to see what happens, and we found – I guess we heard a little bit about the dichotomy which is a harmony between accessibility and excellence – in fact if you work in school after hours it is a very good experimental model, because you invite everybody. You get the applications at the beginning of the year, no selection, everything is open, so it's sort of self-selection by interest, and then it's self-selection by result, meaning that those who come more often, who show more gift, who practice at home and so on, they get better faster, so in fact you combine the non-selective with the increasing quality in a very natural way in the school environment. And then you offer them let's say on the weekend, Saturday, Sunday you offer them extra opportunities in the community, so that you have the connection between the school and the community. So this for us has been a very practical model that we developed after 5 years, and that we are increasingly expanding and getting more requests for, and that's where we need the sustainability experts because we cannot stop but we also get more requests, so this is where we need to do a little bit of magic, and it would be interesting to see what you have to say [to Ulrike Gelbmann].

**Dr Ulrike Gelbmann:**

Thanks for the statement, and thanks also for your statement [to Franka Verhagen], I actually wanted to respond to what you said before, because you talked about thinking out of the box and about getting constantly better, so that's what you also said [to Eduardo Mendez]. So getting back to the initial definition of sustainability, the "Brundtland" one, which is boring actually, but there is also another definition in the Brundtland report and it says: Sustainability is not a state of harmony, but rather a process of change. And this is what I really wanted to stress here, because this constantly changing, constantly getting better, to put it in the words of the Austrian-American philosopher and constructivist Heinz von Foerster: "Always act in a way that makes the number of opportunities grow". So that would be the idea, and one of the most important abilities is resilience, and what we call resilience is the ability to deal with adverse effects, so with any kind of challenges, and in sustainability science we are trying to train it. And one of the most recent studies says that one of the most important abilities to be resilient is the ability to improvise, so not being too strict, not being too much following and pursuing your plans, but the ability to improvise, so this is just what I would suggest integrating everywhere, and I think that El Sistema offers absolutely perfect opportunities for that.

**Leila Weber:**

I just wanted to say something about my experience from the children, that the children ask us to have rehearsals every day 4-5 hours, this is the need that they tell us. We didn't have the possibilities yet to make orchestra rehearsals every day, we are rehearsing 2-3 days a week, but they are really asking "can we have rehearsals every day?", and two hours, one hour is not enough, they want more. And even now the ones that are playing almost two years their instruments are starting to teach the younger ones. So we have two groups, first the more advanced ones have the rehearsal and after that, they come to the small ones to

show them how to play. Just to say, the need is there for the children, they are in schools and they have all these activities, but they want.

**Bruno Campo:**

And maybe I would like to take also the same direction with speaking about the foundation of the Superar Orchestra in Vienna. We had exactly the same barriers at first saying, maybe 4 hours per week is too much for them, and it's not going to be possible, we will have troubles with the parents, this and this and that, and we said, well, let's do the best we can, let's try to think in a didactic that is very efficient, to make every minute the most efficient learning we can give them in these 4 hours per week. And little by little they were so motivated and so happy of the results, and their parents got involved etc. etc., and then it went to 7 hours per week. So little by little you know, it's what you are saying exactly [to Leila Weber], once they are motivated they feel it as a need, because it's not only about playing the instrument, but about really feeling themselves being someone, being someone that is constantly developing, and that makes a huge difference and that really impacts society.

**Dr Elisabeth Freismuth:**

I want to add something about what you were saying, Bruno, about Superar and I wanted to share our experience of Superar. It's now the third year of being member of Superar here in Graz, and it was my decision to enter into this project together with Caritas, because we do have a lot of elementary schools here with more than 80% of people coming from abroad. They have one hour of choir lesson per day, so 4 hours per week, from Monday to Thursday, and it was so interesting at the press conference when we were sitting there presenting this project and the idea behind this that our best teachers and alumni are teaching choir in these schools, so it's a win-win situation for both sides. The journalists wanted to know, because these 4 hours are in the regular program of the children, so it's not an add on, and they said "so what do you do with these 4 hours you lose now?" And we said "nothing" and they said "well, they lose these 4 hours", and so they did not understand what the rector of the school explained which is, that these children don't miss these 4 hours, because they are much more concentrated, everything is quicker because they are more precise, and they have much more concentration because of this conductor when he lifts his arm, and the other teachers said "we use this system now, we do like the conductor and they watch and listen". And my personal experience was after a couple of weeks when we were starting this project in one really burning elementary school here in Graz. We have more than 1300 concerts per year here within the university and one was in the main concert hall, it was the Carmina Burana, and we invited these children to come along and to sing in this professional concert in the Stephaniensaal, so 1,700 people watching, and they had special t-shirts: "Superar". And it was so impressive to see not only what happened to the children, but their parents were there. And these people have never ever in their life before come to a classical concert or even into such a traditional concert hall, and we experienced the same when we had last year two concerts here in this room, and we realized that their parents were coming. And not only their parents, their mothers were coming alone, so even that in a couple of cultures is not normal, and I think the sustainable success of this incredible project is much more than that we train children how to sing well and how to enjoy music. To have the result that after a couple of weeks they were singing songs in 12 different languages, and that they were singing in Latin, so, so many things happened with them personally and with their families, and their brothers and sisters and aunts and fathers and mothers and grandmothers, and

this is I think the amazing thing as well for your projects, and this is I think the success of a society of integration and again of how we should use the wealth or values we do have here in our countries.

**Dr Christine Rhomberg:**

I would only like to add two small things. My first experience with the first Superar concert in Vorarlberg was that there were 100 kids on stage after three months of singing, and there were about 25 of their siblings sitting on the floor and they were singing each and every song with the choir, and that means the children sing at home. So they sing at home and the younger brothers and sisters learn the songs, and this is a very good sign because it's not only happening in the school. And there is another thing referring to what you said [to Ulrike Gelbmann] about resilience of musicians etc. I learned from Gerald Wirth in Vienna that he knows a person who is looking for CEO's for huge companies in India, and do you know where he is looking for these people? In the orchestras. Because he says that musicians are used to react in a completely different way than other people. So what I want to say with this is, first, before we can change something in this field, we have to create the awareness for the power of music, again, because many people just do not know about that and don't understand why music is so important, and if only the responsible people in our ministries would know, they would not reduce the hours of music lessons in the primary schools. But I think it's a lack of awareness for what music can really do and can change in the lives of people, and of children especially, and I think this is a very important thing to do.

**Bruno Campo:**

And definitely I think - not only in the way how music can be a power of transformation, but let's say for people that are still interested in the industry of music – I mean the creation of new audiences that this represents, it can really solve this problem of the concert halls not getting enough audiences, so it's a very long term possibility. Walter.

**Walter Gutdeutsch:**

I'm very happy to hear all these fantastic things, and I'm totally convinced that this is the most beautiful thing, but I think now we are talking about how we can apply the ideas of El Sistema in Europe, and I want to touch one point. We talked about teaching, and that the teachers have to be able not only to teach the fingering or whatever and notes and so on, but also to look for discipline, not by saying "Now, sit down! And don't hit always your neighbour with your bow!" and so on. I'm working with students and teachers in many countries, and this is the problem which is totally normal in Europe, especially in music schools which now have to collaborate with primary schools, secondary schools, because the "Klassenmusizieren", how do you say this in English? Look, a music teacher who studied in a music university to teach an instrument is not used to teach a class of children in a primary school. Because the children who come to a European teacher, a classical, traditional way to learn an instrument, they do it voluntarily, but now the teachers of the music schools have to collaborate with other schools, primary and secondary schools, and there is the whole class, and not everybody is interested in playing a music instrument. So it's a big difficulty for discipline. And also the conflicts in the group besides the music are always there, and they come out when there is a teacher there, when the children think "oh, now I have more freedom, now I can do what I want because everything is happy and joy and let's have fun". So my question is: how can we teach our teachers in the universities in a better way? Not

repertoire, repertoire, four years of studies for the IGP-study [instrumental pedagogy] and to be really good on the instruments, but also these soft skills. How to cope with difficulties, how to cope with quarrels between the children. I remember Abreu said once, that maybe one of the differences of Latin American countries and Europe is, that the culture in Latin America is more homogenous, and we are totally diverse in Europe, so I think the socialisation is a very strong challenge. How can we prepare our future teachers better? This is my question to all people who teach teachers in universities.

**Bruno Campo:**

Diversity. In Sistema Europe Youth Orchestra, it is one of the mottos, or the motto. How this diversity of Europe all together becomes unity, and that's something that is on everyone's mind there, and it works very well.

**Dr Eduardo Mendez:**

I just want to say a few things, listening to all of you that have a very clear idea of all of these issues. I want to talk about the improvisation that you talked about [to Ulrike Gelbmann], which is very important. I said once in a management forum where they invited me to talk about how to manage so big and huge institutions like this one [El Sistema Venezuela], and I said, well, first thing: we manage the improvisation. And this is something that maybe can be a contradiction, but it's the truth. I mean, we have some teams specialized to improvise, because you never know what is going to happen in something like this, if someone asks you for a concert the day after tomorrow, or if you need to do a tour in Italy for something special because of all the relationships we have, or if we need to improvise something different, so we have this, and it's something that maybe we can really learn about, because it's, I think, the only way we can develop a big institution like this in a country like ours. So this is something that I wanted to say. Then about the education that you mentioned [to Bernhard Gritsch], that if we put this within the school system I would like to share the experience with El Sistema in Venezuela, so maybe it will be helpful. Of course the structure of El Sistema has the *nucleos*, which are the main structures which I explained in the beginning. We have 442 *nucleos* in Venezuela at the moment. And then we have also applied many other "módulos" as we call them [modules], which are smaller than a *nucleo* and it depends on each *nucleo* regarding to the place where it is located. But these "módulos", most of them are located in the public school system, so as Maria mentioned, we start to make the music for the children happen at the schools during the afternoons, and she said perfectly, everyone maybe applies, but then the natural selection does that the ones that are really interested go into the *nucleos*. So this experience has been done by us for at least 15 years, and it started in the "Núcleo Sarriá" in a population in Venezuela very close to our venue. And then many other schools started to apply this by themselves, because it was a solution for them to have an extra program inside the schools, and you see the spaces of the school with music teaching, and many children involved become beneficiaries of this program. But now the program has been so successful, and that's what allowed us to get 1 million children involved. We have 442 *nucleos* for the 1 million children, most of those children come from the public school system. So now what is happening, in this moment particularly, is that we are having meetings with the ministry of education, because they want us to be now part of the pensum in the school every day during the regular pensum, because they understood the importance of music and they want to have the music and the methodology of El Sistema in the curriculum, so every classroom will have a choir for



example, or every classroom will have an ensemble, or every classroom can have a string quartet or something, because then you have them since they are very young, very children, so you will have this development and it's something that – of course in the end not everyone will be a musician, but - everyone will know and will learn values in the same way. So the ones who want to keep going with music have the option to go into the *nucleo* or to go to the conservatory or go to the university, because I want to say that next year we will have our own university as well, so we will have some collaboration [to Elisabeth Freismuth]. It will be named "José Antonio Abreu" as our founder of course, so this is what will happen. But this is our experience with the public school system. Another important thing that happens in Venezuela is that El Sistema adapts to the needs of the children. So maybe not – and you mentioned [to Christine Rhomberg] that not - everyone is used to attend or likes to go to a classical music concert, so what "Fundamusical", which is the institution in Venezuela who runs the Sistema, has been doing since the last years, is to also jump into new genres of music as well, so we jumped into the traditional folk music genre, we jumped into the popular music, we jumped into the choir of Sistema, so different areas that can use music as a whole also, because maybe some children don't like to play the violin at the beginning, but then you can catch him by playing the "cuatro" [Latin American guitar-like instrument], which is more natural for him, it's the kind of sounds he hears close to his house or in the neighbourhood where he lives. But then after he is inside with us, you can start teaching him some other things, you can teach him how to do music, and you can also teach him how to play the violin once maybe after one or two years that he is with us. So the way of catching the children has to be in a fun way, because here we are not talking about something that is mandatory for the children, we are talking about to offer them a product that could be a forum for them that they like, and in Venezuela what happened is that the parents get involved into the program from the beginning, and the children are the ones who ask them to take them to the *nucleo*, because when they are in the *nucleo* or when they are being part of some project in the music, they want to be there. It's not like they have many offers, because of course, we understand that in countries like these there are offers, but we are not talking about having them you know in a program like where it is forbidden to be happy, it's a completely different thing, they are going there because they like to go there. It's the same with the children who likes to play soccer, they go because they like this, and they would love to go 5 days a week, 4 hours playing football. So what we do with music is this. We present a methodology which is an innovation, as I mentioned at the beginning, that is something that they really get fast results with so they have fun. It's not something where they are there with the teacher like "Oh my god, I didn't practice, I don't want to go to the lesson", it's completely different: "I want to go because I want to really do it", so I think that it is something that they like. And of course we had to create in our case – you don't have this problem, but we had this problem – we needed to create a "motivation way". We have no classical music history, of course, and then we created all the structure around El Sistema, and now we have something like for example Gustavo Dudamel, we have the Simón Bolívar Orchestra, that is very young, I mean, we have only 43 years developing El Sistema, but now we have top musicians playing in the Berlin Philharmonics, playing in different orchestras, conducting different orchestras, of course Gustavo. So now in Venezuela – I don't know if you know but in Venezuela the main sport is baseball, and we have many players who play in the big leagues in the United States, so before all the children in Venezuela wanted to play baseball, because they wanted to achieve to be in the big leagues playing baseball. Now they

want to be like Gustavo Dudamel, so many of those musicians want to be once in a big orchestra in the world.

**Bruno Campo:**

So we have to go very soon to questions, because unfortunately time is running, but one more, two more, two quick more?

**Walter Gutdeutsch:**

One question to Eduardo: How do you teach your teachers so that they are able to do this work in El Sistema? Maybe this could be an inspiration for our universities here.

**Dr Eduardo Mendez:**

I can say, you learn how to be a teacher when you are in the *nucleo* getting all the information from your teachers. So you teach what you learn, and you are used to teach since you are very young, because, as we spoke in the beginning, you teach what you know to the next one, and your teacher as well is the one motivating you to do that and helping you to do that in a way, so this methodology is like learning and imitating what you learn and then you do it at the same time. So El Sistema actually is teaching its own group of teachers, all the teachers that teach now in Sistema, around 7,000, are coming from inside El Sistema, so it is like a full cycle, so we develop the teachers and we develop the youth and then they become teachers as well in El Sistema. We don't wait until we have a Ph.D. as a Professor to teach.

**Walter Gutdeutsch:**

Maybe that's the point.

**Dr Ulrike Gelbmann:**

May I just – just to address your question before. 2005 to 2014 was the UNESCO decade of sustainable education presenting lots of information and research output, and one of my favourite ones was the one by Sterling and he said that there are two kinds of learning: there is the instrumental value that you have in learning and there is the intrinsic value. The instrumental value in sustainability learning would be how you save energy or in your case how to play the violin or whatever. The intrinsic value would be being enthused, being empathic, being responsible, motivating yourself and others, so this might be the idea to make teachers address these aspects more than the instrumental one. And there is another approach by Heinz von Förster and Ernst von Glasersfeld, famous constructivist, and they say that it's not legitimate to ask questions that have already been asked, or to put it the other way: the teacher must always be willing to learn with his or her students. So this might also be an opportunity for teachers to be open-minded and learning from their students and to teach them how to be that.

**Franka Verhagen:**

I just wanted to connect the idea that Eduardo was saying about teaching. We teach how to teach by teaching during the teaching process, as well as they learn how to play or how to sing and so forth. 1,337,000 children involved in El Sistema; we do not pretend them all to be musicians professionally of course, but they will take all these values that we have discussed, and where would Gustavo Dudamel be if he wouldn't have had the chance to get to a *nucleo*,

or Edicson Ruiz. I mean, getting to as many children as possible, we can discover the talents that are around. In El Sistema the teaching process has to be daily and as I grew up in a Dutch education system, I understand what you are saying about all the possibilities, but then for instance when I see that parents do take their kids to soccer or hockey training 3 or 4 times a week and then to the game in the weekend, and they do not consider the same effort for someone who wants to play an instrument and be part of an orchestra, I think that's something we have to think about and to change that. Our program for teachers and conductors is working with all our people of El Sistema who are teaching, we have children from 13 years old who come once a week, because they are teaching to their peers, their friends a few years younger, so we teach them pedagogical skills, we teach them Dalcroze, and playing with them being 13 years old they just take the same games we do with them to their *nucleo* and do the same with their kids. The same thing with playing a violin, they know how to play a song, and we do not make any limits, I mean if he can play it well and he knows to do the fingering and how to use the bow, he is allowed to teach it, of course always under supervision. So it's also a lot of trust being able to give responsibility to young children and to accompany them.

**Bruno Campo:**

Beautiful view, thank you!. We have 10 or less minutes to open some questions for the audience, who would like to jump first?

**Audience 1:**

Thank you very much for this opportunity, and I just wanted to ask, because I worked in a volunteer project in the Peruvian Andes as well, and we had some children from rural areas who would go to the cities to learn English, and I know how hard it is to get the children from the rural areas into the cities, so I just wanted to ask how you manage all the infrastructure in your project, and how it is even possible to organize so many instruments for the kids?

**Dr Eduardo Mendez:**

As I mentioned at the beginning this is a public policy of the Venezuelan state, and we have the support for all this infrastructure and the structure of the government to be part of this organisation. Of course the instruments we buy them from different supporters, the government gives us to buy the instruments for everyone so of course the instruments remain under the control of the foundation. But we allow them to use them, to take them home, they sign a little contract, so this is the way we handle the instruments. And about the transportation and things, also we get some busses and we get some transportation possibilities from the government that helps us to do everything. It would be impossible to have a huge institution like this one without the support of the government definitely.

**Audience 2:**

Thank you for this opportunity. I wanted to ask if in the beginning of El Sistema it was easy to get the support of the government or it was difficult?

**Dr Eduardo Mendez:**

Of course not, it was very difficult. Everyone said to Maestro Abreu that he was crazy, many people attacked him about the methodology, they said it was a crazy thing, the technique of the children would be damaged because they would play in the orchestra, many things like

that. And of course not, he had to make a lot of lobbying with different persons. Of course Maestro Abreu – maybe people don't know him or know this story, but he - was a very charismatic person, a very able person to do politics, he was also an economist, he was also a musician, so he was connected to the people in the government at that moment, and he had to do a lot of lobbying to get the foundation inside the government. But the real secret is that El Sistema has never been a cultural policy, it has always been a social policy because at the end the first thing that have budget cuts is the culture. And that is something very contradictive because Maestro Abreu always said that when there is a crisis you have to jump into culture, so it's a contradiction. Well this was the thing, he sold the program as a cultural social inclusion-program and it was easier that way to get some money. Now of course after many years that Sistema grew, since the year 2000 it was really stated as a public policy, actually now Sistema belongs to the ministry of the presidency of the republic of Venezuela, so it is seen as a strategic project for the country, and this is something of course we need to know and we need to say because it is the truth.

### **Audience 3:**

Thank you very much for coming and it's very exciting to have a lot of people from my country here and hearing some Venezuelan accent, it's really, really nice. Well, I have a comment on how the kids develop there and their opportunities compared to the opportunities the kids have here, like playing football and doing different activities. I think kids in Venezuela also have different opportunities but they are just different, when you talk with a kid, depending on their social status. Perhaps they don't have the opportunity to go to soccer lessons all of them because of different factors, but of course there are many other factors in the streets that you also want to go and do, and I think it's really impressive that there is this system that attracts them and that brings them, and that keeps them from doing all of these bad activities that they perhaps could do on the streets. So that was one comment, and I have another question. What do you think are the challenges that you have right now in Venezuela for expanding and getting more children into the program?

### **Dr Eduardo Mendez:**

Well, first I want to compliment your comment, and to say that El Sistema is also seen actually by the UN, the United Nations, as a good practice for how to spend your free time. And in our case we were there in the UN making a little exposition of Sistema. It's a good practice of crime prevention, because then the children are not in the streets as you mentioned. In a country like ours it's something very difficult to be day by day in the streets, but when they come into El Sistema they spend all the time doing something good and playing music. But also there is something regarding the options, and I have to say something. We have *nucleos* in Venezuela not only in the poor areas, I mean, we have *nucleos* for everyone, middle class also attending *nucleos* in some areas in the city. But the best results are always in the *nucleos* that have less opportunities, so in Venezuela the instrument is like the toy, it's like the PlayStation of the children. They don't have anything else to do so they do play music every day, and that's why they want to come to the *nucleos* every day. And sometimes when you have, maybe not soccer lessons, but you have other activities at home or wherever so you don't practice so often, or you prefer to stay at home sometimes, and that does happen, so the results in our case is that the people who have less opportunities they have the best results, as musicians even. And the challenges as I mentioned, one of the first ones is to keep going, we have now the goal to reach 2 million

children, the president recently asked us to achieve 2 million children. We are finishing our second building for teaching in Caracas, regarding to an agreement with the Inter-American Development Bank, which is a building for arts and teaching education. We have one already and we are expanding to the second one, so we hope that next year we can open the building. And in those buildings there will be the place for the university as I mentioned, also one of the challenges for the next year. But anyhow, to keep the stability of the institution with all the challenges our country is facing, is one of the priorities we have definitely.

**Bruno Campo:**

One last question.

**Audience 4:**

Thank you very much, I was born in Guatemala City, I come from America, and America is very diverse, in Guatemala we have 22 ethnic groups, I come from Los Angeles also and over there we have a beautiful diversity that we always confront. I'm so glad that you are visiting here, and my question is: do you have such diversity in Venezuela, and how do you include all this diversity in El Sistema?

**Dr Eduardo Mendez:**

Well, music is inclusion definitely. Of course we have diversity in Venezuela, and it doesn't matter what race the children have, well, actually in Venezuela we don't have any race problems at all, but it doesn't matter how rich or poor you are, you share all the time the same orchestra and the same *nucleo*, but also I have to say, the music has gone through the borders of Venezuela and has come to countries like these, or like Sweden where we have a lot of refugee programs that are using El Sistema as a tool, because then you can put children in the same room, and it doesn't matter the religion problems they have inside, and then outside the parents who are Muslims or Jewish or whatever they have to talk because the children are there sharing music inside the orchestra, and this is something that is happening right now in different *nucleos* of El Sistema worldwide, so I think music is inclusion and the figure of doing as a group in a collective way sharing all these experiences will definitely break the borders of the people and make a culture of peace.

**Bruno Campo:**

It has been a beautiful morning, thank you everyone for being here. We will proceed at 1pm with lunch for everyone offered by the university, and at 2pm the party starts with all the ensembles from El Sistema, just follow the people. Thank you, all our panellists, for being here today, it was really beautiful and a big honour also for me. Thank you, Rector Freismuth, for opening your doors and supporting all these ideas. Thank you, Eduardo and El Sistema, and everybody for being here, thank you very much.

Transcription: Maria Sandberg Ballowitz