

L'ECHONOVA:

Music as a Strategy for the Dynamisation of Cultural and Associative Life



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L'Échonova: Music as a Strategy for the Dynamisation of Cultural and Associative Life

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Abstract

L'Échonova is a public concert hall for 'current music' [*musiques actuelles*], located in Saint-Avé, a town in the urban area of Vannes in Brittany, France. Beyond the production of events related to a multitude of musical expressions, allowing the interaction of very diverse audiences, it is also a meeting place for amateur musicians who come to rehearse in one of their studios. Therefore, it is also an important support for local amateur musicians in the process of becoming professionals, as well as for local professional musicians who wish to improve their performance (in terms of recording and staging). Since its inauguration in 2010, the range of activities conducted by *L'Échonova* has increased and grown beyond the green walls that surround it. Many partnerships with schools, city halls, chapels, hospitals, prisons, etc. allow music performances in spaces other than concert halls. Thus, they are able to reach audiences that, for different reasons, otherwise could not be in front of the stage. The study shows the importance of a public facility capable of interacting with a multiplicity of actors and integrating different forms of professional and amateur practices in its environment. This promotes the diversity of cultural expressions available in the territory and takes into account the challenge of making them accessible to different social groups.

Keywords: current music, concert hall, public service, musicians, audience

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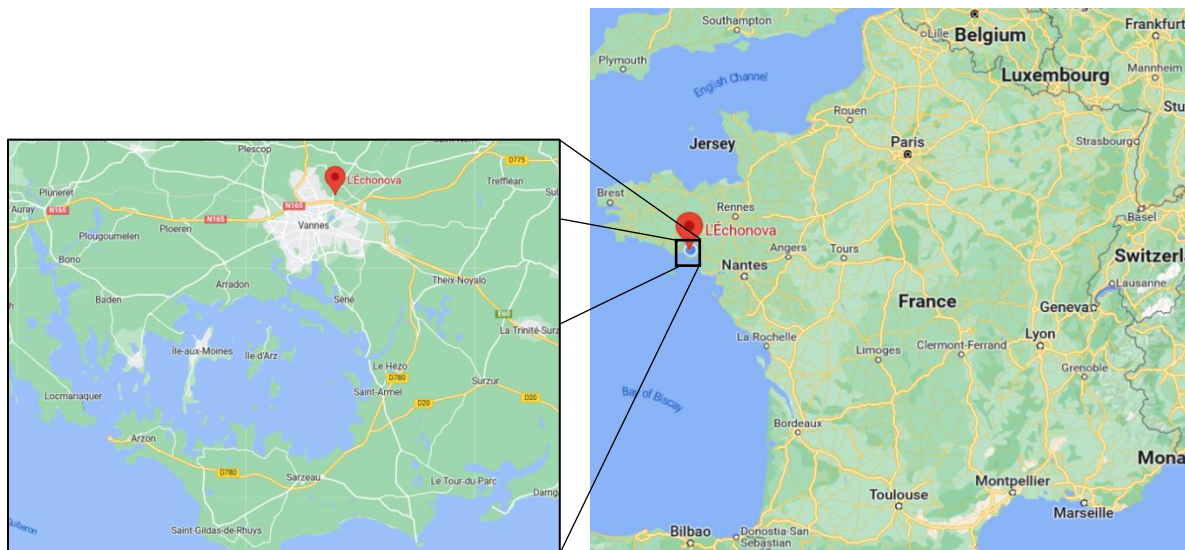
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Introduction

L'Échonova is a public concert hall for 'current music' [*musiques actuelles*]. Beyond the production of events related to a multitude of musical expressions, allowing the interaction of very diverse audiences, it is also a meeting place for amateur musicians who come to rehearse in one of their studios. Therefore, it is also an important support for local amateur musicians in the process of becoming professionals, as well as for local professional musicians who wish to improve their performance (in terms of recording and staging).

L'Échonova is located in Saint-Avé, a town with 11 thousand inhabitants in Brittany. This town is the second most populated location of an urban area composed of 34 cities, towns, and villages (ranging from 227 to 53.7 thousand inhabitants, in total slightly less than 170 thousand inhabitants). *L'Échonova's* role was to respond to the demand of local music actors (professional and amateur musicians, NPOs organising concerts, festivals, vinyl fairs, etc.) and the public in search of the type of activities these actors were offering. It started out as a place able to accommodate performances and cultural actions and has become a hub that coordinates both volunteers and associations in its operations.

Figure 1 - Location of *L'Échonova*



Credit: GoogleMaps.

Since its inauguration in 2010, the range of activities conducted by *L'Échonova* has increased and grown beyond the green walls that surround it. Many partnerships with schools, city halls, chapels, hospitals, and prisons allow the music to be played in spaces other than the concert

hall and to reach audiences that, for different reasons, otherwise could not be in front of the stage.

Methodology

This case study was developed using three simultaneous approaches. First, the analysis of a corpus of press articles related to the implementation of a public concert hall in the urban area of Vannes (Brittany) and the structuring of the network of local musical actors covering the period 2002-2010. This corpus was completed by press articles covering the activities of *L'Échonova* since 2010. These documents allow us to reconstitute the public account of the setting up of this facility and the network of actors involved over time.

Secondly, we analysed a corpus of 'grey literature' composed of all *L'Échonova*'s annual activity reports available as well as diagnostic and/or evaluation reports made by or addressed to public authorities at different levels (city hall, urban area government, ministry of culture) and moments. This corpus is central not only because it allows us to follow in detail what has been implemented as well as the evolution of *L'Échonova*'s objectives, but also because it allows us to follow the objectives of the public authorities in the implementation of such a project. We can observe how a relatively strict framework has fluctuated over the years. In particular, we can follow the evolution of the 'contractual specifications' imposed on *L'Echonova* and other similar facilities.

Finally, we conducted a series of interviews with current staff at *L'Échonova* (4), musicians who have been helped in the professionalisation process (3), volunteers (3), and regular members of the audience (5). These interviews play an important role in providing perspective on information from official reports and press articles. They also allow us to capture finer aspects of how *L'Échonova* operates and how those directly involved in its activities experience them.

Context and background

The creation of *L'Échonova* can be seen as a response to the demands of a network of local actors linked to the production and diffusion of live music. On the other hand, it is also part of a long process of decentralisation and mutualisation (between the different levels of government) of the national cultural policy concerning the sector of 'amplified music' and then of 'current music'.

A national policy for 'current music'

Since the mid-20th century, cultural policies implemented by French governments have been marked by an effort to 'democratise' culture. Certainly, this expression designates logics and policies that have differed over time. Sometimes they were focused on the diffusion of and access to 'highbrow' works of art to larger audiences, and sometimes on the remodelling of the content of these works by making the boundaries between the highbrow arts and the lowbrow arts more blurred. Regarding music, the arrival in power of François Mitterrand (1981) was an important turning point. In fact, from the 1980s onwards, a policy of promoting

a musical spectrum beyond highbrow music intensified, initially with jazz, traditional music, and world music; and, at the end of the 1980s, rock, rap, and electronic music. Likewise, the processes of decentralisation of artistic production and dissemination were accelerated.

In this process, marked by the construction of 'amplified music' as a field of action for political powers (Teillet, 2002), the creation of the '*cafés-musiques*' programme in 1991 was central (Bensignor, 1994). This programme was the result of an inter-ministerial initiative that benefitted from the support of several levels of government (cities, departments, and regions). The *cafés-musiques* were small local facilities focused on conviviality, the performance of concerts, the integration of young people (who preferentially managed these spaces), and the revitalisation of local cultural life. However, these facilities did not have a sufficient structure to satisfy the demands of professional artists. Furthermore, they were contested by the already established small cultural venues with which they competed. Finally, since the project was somewhat ambivalent, it led to disputes between the different ministries. Due to all this, the programme was suspended in 1995.

Between 1995 and 1998, the government designed the system of '*current music*' venues (*Scènes de Musiques Actuelles*, SMAC). First of all, it was necessary to define the object of public policy, i.e. the category of 'current music' which included very diverse musical genres, practices and artistic expressions. Secondly, there was the intention to use concert halls as facilities to reorganise the local urban landscape by building a network of clearly identified, labelled and subsidised venues in partnership with local governments. The objective was to improve the economic structure of the contemporary music sector. In 2006, the plan for the national and local development of current music was adopted. In 2010, the development of a set of specifications related to the SMAC label followed. These specifications were updated in 2017.

The challenges of local structuring

Since the early 2000s, the creation of a facility dedicated to *current music* has been on the horizon of local governments in the French department of Morbihan. Indeed, as indicated in a report commissioned by the Association for the Development of Live Arts in Morbihan (ADDAV 56) in 2001, the department of Morbihan reported the relative scarcity of spaces capable of hosting professional performances by local groups, as well as spaces dedicated to the rehearsal of musical groups, training and information for professional musicians and amateur musicians in the process of becoming professionals (Meckel, 2001).

This incubation period lasted for several years. A second study was commissioned by the administration of the Vannes metropolitan area in 2003. A year later, the creation of a concert hall dedicated to contemporary music was announced, with an inauguration initially planned for 2006. The delay in the definition of the project and the modification of the legal framework of SMACs in 2006 postponed the period of structuring, and the inauguration finally took place only in 2010. At the same time, the network of associations involved in the production and dissemination of music by local groups became more compact. In 2007, this network comprised more than 150 musicians and musical groups. More than a dozen associations of the region of Vannes were organised around the collective '*Le bruit défend*' [the forbidden/defended noise]. The latter aimed to give visibility to the local musical production.

It intended to do so by exerting pressure on the local governments to supply equipment dedicated to the diffusion of its own musical production. This initiative resulted in a CD launched in 2008, compiling titles representative of the diversity of groups active in the region.

Before the opening of *L'Échonova* in 2010, these collectives and the local authorities set up a temporary space that prefigured an important part of the activities later integrated into the project. This allowed them to be tested in close collaboration with the local actors. Named *L'Éphémère*, the venue also had the objective of bringing the whole population together to understand the importance of the establishment of a place dedicated to current music on its territory. During three quarters of 2009, 31 concerts were held, involving nearly 90 local artists. These concerts were organised by a dozen associations and reached an audience of almost 8,000 people. Half of the concerts were rock concerts (rock, metal, punk, and hardcore) and 53% were performed by professional musicians (*L'Échonova*, 2010).

Description of the concrete cultural policy instrument

L'Échonova was inaugurated on March 26th, 2010, as a venue dedicated to current music that can accommodate an audience of 600 people. Since the start of activities, it has organised on average 45 concerts annually. It also has five rehearsal studios, a recording studio, and a documentation centre. Its activities are organised according to axes established during the multi-annual artistic and cultural projects (2010–2012, 2013–2017, 2018–2021). The core of

these projects has been relatively stable since their beginning and has included: 1) a special attention paid to satisfying the public and its 'open-mindedness'; 2) supporting the local artistic creation; and 3) making a contribution to the structuring of the sector of current music. The two main changes in the content of the project's axes concern the place of the

Figure 2 - External view of *L'Échonova*



associative actors and the way the public is treated in the project. The associative actors, who were at the centre of the initial project and played an important role in the implementation of the activities within *L'Échonova*, were no longer explicitly highlighted and were replaced by the current music sector at different scales (including international). Likewise, the public was no longer considered an entity that should be educated, developed or emancipated, but essentially as a group to be accessed and respected for its diversity. In other words, the public was no longer seen as a group to be constructed or transformed but as a reality that a programme should adapt to.

In terms of its operation, the overall budget of *L'Échonova* is approximately one million euros annually, about 70% of which comes from public subsidies¹. It has a board of directors chaired by a local representative and composed of about 15 members (including both elected officials and representatives of civil society). Its permanent team has fluctuated between 9 and 15 people over time, including its director. Until now, its director and programmer have been chosen for three-year terms (renewable). This position has been held by Pierre Pauly (2008-2009; 2010-2012), Frédéric Carré (2013-2015; 2016-2019), Mathieu Siorat (2020)² and Mathieu Meyer (2022-2024). In addition to this team, there is a group of an average of 78 volunteers who work (according to availability and interest) in smaller groups throughout the year, especially during concert evenings, and play a central role in the reception of the public and musicians, the bar, and security, among others.

Above all, a concert hall accessible to all audiences

L'Échonova's core activity is the promotion and production of professional-quality, affordable 'medium-sized'³ concerts of current music. Let's take a look at each of these elements. The first objective of *L'Échonova* is to provide artists and audiences with a professional concert hall, both in terms of sound quality and stage setup. This high-quality infrastructure is the sine qua non for being able to both host professional artists on tour and allow local artists in the process of becoming professionals to face the constraints of performing on this kind of stage (for some of them for the first time).

The implementation of such equipment presupposes, however, that the concert hall has the capacity to receive a relatively important public, compared to the capacity of the private concert halls existing on the whole French territory and in the region in particular. Indeed, since the region's concert halls are generally much too small and often have a precarious or improvised acoustic infrastructure, the professional concerts organised in the department took place only during festivals or exceptional large-scale events attracting several thousand people.



¹ We have ended our analysis in 2019 due to the impact that the COVID-19 pandemic had on the overall activity of the sector, which has not yet recovered to its pre-crisis level. All monetary values (including banknotes) are expressed in 2021 euros. As an example, in 2019, its overall budget reaches € 1,076,455, of which a subsidy of 71%.

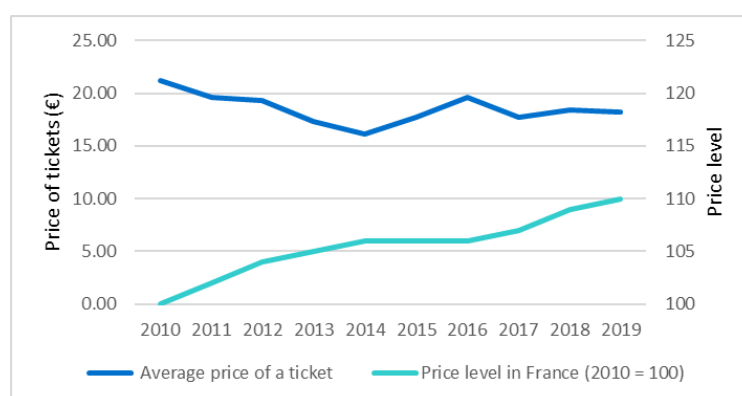
² As Mathieu is stepping down from his position very quickly and due to the context of the COVID -19 pandemic, the direction of *L'Échonova* during 2021 has been ensured by a transition board.

³According to the study conducted by the European non-governmental network supporting live music associations *Live DMA* in 2017: '(...) 51% are small venues (<400-audience capacity), 36% are medium-sized venues (400 to 999 capacity) and only 13% are large venues (1000+ audience capacity). The larger venues often consist of multiple smaller concert halls. The median capacity of all live music venues [in Europe] is 375 audience capacity. (...) Public venues in average have larger concert halls for live music (600 median), compared to private non-profit venues (399 median) and private commercial venues (300 median)'. (Live DMA, 2020: 3). This means that a 'medium-sized' venue has, in fact, a capacity much higher than the median capacity of concert venues in Europe.

Thus, *L'Échonova* responds to the demand, both from the public and the artists, to accommodate concerts with audiences ranging from 300 to 600 people (i.e. much too large for private venues and much too small for exceptional events).

Finally, the articulation of these two elements is directly linked to the question of the affordability of concerts. Indeed, the implementation of a concert hall with such a configuration (in terms of quality and capacity) would imply, if it were a private facility, the amortisation of a large investment that would result in an excessively expensive price of tickets that could, moreover, make the concert hall economically unviable. This explains the importance of public action and public funds in the functioning of a concert hall with such infrastructure. Not only does *L'Échonova* have a pricing policy with a large number of lower-paying categories (young people, elderly, unemployed, etc.), but the average 'full' price of a ticket remains much lower than the average price of a concert ticket in France (-42.2%)⁴ and its evolution is negative over time (i.e. the average price of a ticket increases less than inflation). As shown in Graph 1, in 2010, the average listener paid €21 for a concert; in 2019, he or she paid €18 (i.e. -14.3%)⁵.

Graph 1 - Average price of a ticket at *L'Échonova* and Price level in France, 2010-2019



Source: *L'Échonova* annual reports (2010-2019). All prices are in 2021 euros.

This pricing policy is one of the reasons for the existence of this facility, and this fact deserves to be highlighted: due to public funding, *L'Échonova* can have both a quality programme and to produce concerts that are affordable for the most economically disadvantaged people. Furthermore, each year, on average, 1/3 of the concerts produced are free (maximum in 2016, when there were 40% of the free concerts). On average, 29% of the total annual audience benefits from a free entrance. However, it is not the only action aimed at expanding the concert audience. Due to the off-centre location of *L'Échonova* and the weakness of the public transportation network in the Vannes agglomeration (especially in the evenings), since 2011, a free bus line (*L'Échonavette*) serving the main neighbourhoods of the city has been put in place on the evenings of the concerts, with schedules adapted to each show. This initiative has a double objective: first, to allow people who travel mainly via public transportation to get to the site. Secondly, it reduces the risk of accidents related to the consumption of alcoholic

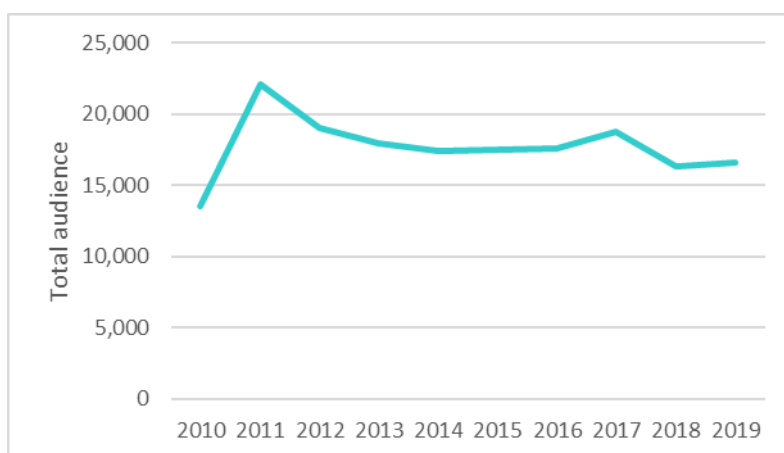
⁴ Here we compare values from 2016, the latest published (Henni 2016).

⁵ The prices are expressed in 2021 euros.

beverages during the events. However, one should say that the audience does not use this means of transport very much, and the service is far from being a success: in 2019, each *L'Échonavette* carried an average of 11 passengers.

In terms of audience (see **Graph 2** below), *L'Échonova* has an average audience of 17,692 per year, a number that, after a peak audience in 2011 (22,095 people), is trending downward, with a total audience of 16,597 in 2019 (a loss of almost ¼ of the audience from 2011). This declining concert attendance is a constant concern in the annual reports, even though its importance is often mitigated by taking into account the audience present during workshops or events taking place outside the walls, which allows for a relative stability of the total audience.

Graph 2 - Total concert audience, 2010-2019



Source : *L'Échonova* annual reports (2010-2019)

Opening up to different audiences is also a goal to be achieved through the diversity of musical genres programmed and through events aimed at a well-targeted audience (we will come back to this later). Although rock/metal are the most programmed genres since the opening of *L'Échonova*, representing between 35% and 39% of the concerts, world music and hip-hop are taking an increasingly important place in the programming. The preponderance of rock/metal is also expressed in a more male audience (on average 66%). Thus, as the musical genres, the gender of the artists and the composition of the audience are linked, the attention to gender parity among the programmed artists (which was integrated into *L'Échonova* project in 2016) also meant diversification of the programmed musical genres and, also, a greater gender parity among the audience: from 2017 to 2019, the share of artists counting with a male leader dropped from 74% to 68%; over the same period, the share of women in the audience increased from 45% to 48%.

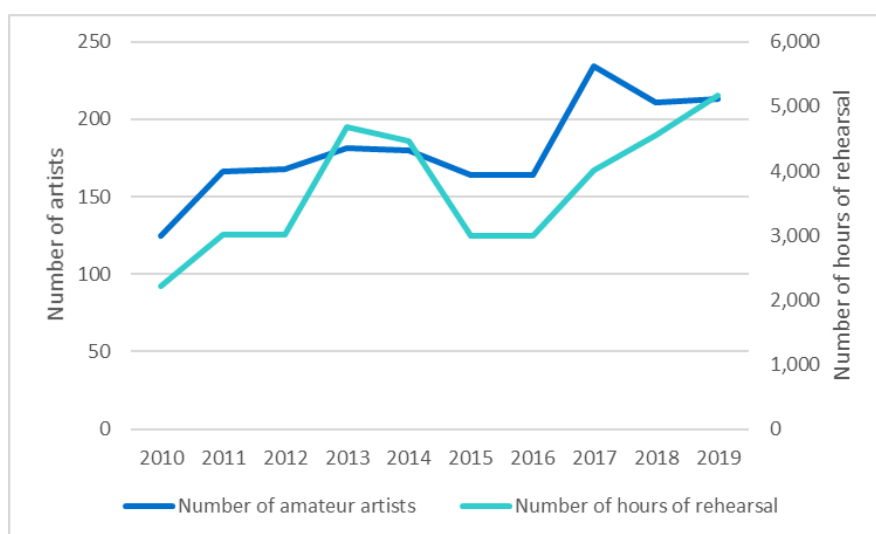
Support for amateur and professional musicians

As mentioned earlier, one of the major issues in the development of the *L'Échonova* project was its role as a facility for local musicians (amateur and professional). On the side of amateur musicians, it was essentially the demand for appropriate rehearsal studios. On the side of the professional musicians, it was a question of having a professional stage open to the artists of

the region. To answer these two questions, *L'Échonova* integrated the support of artists in the process of professionalisation and the support of professional groups.

In terms of facilities dedicated to amateur music practice, *L'Échonova* has five rehearsal studios ranging in size from 15 m² to 50 m², one of which allows for the recording of non-commercial demos. During the day, these studios are reserved for accompanied groups, school groups, and local professional groups. In the evenings, from 6 p.m. to midnight, these studios are open to amateur groups at an hourly fee that varies according to their size and the number of people rehearsing there. The number of groups that come to rehearse and the number of hours of rehearsals per year have been increasing since its inauguration (**Graph 3**).

Graph 3 - Annual use of rehearsal studios, 2010-2019



Source : *L'Échonova* annual reports (2010-2019)

On average, 180 artists pass through *L'Échonova*'s rehearsal studios each year, which corresponds to 3,710 hours of rehearsals per year. The drop in the number of rehearsal hours between 2014 and 2016 is partially explained by the implementation of a new schedule and time distribution system for studio use that increased the number of off-peak hours in the studios.

This rehearsal space is also a place for musicians to meet and for the *L'Échonova* team to identify groups that could eventually be supported in their structuring and professionalisation via the *L'Écho des Studios* programme. Each year, several groups of all aesthetic backgrounds are selected upon application. During a season spread out between September and June, each group benefits from a real training course articulated around four axes that are intended to be as close as possible to reality in terms of development and which are:

- **Artistic:** diagnostic interviews, with three 6-hour sessions in the recording studio and three 5-hour stage diagnostic sessions; accompanied rehearsals throughout the season; free access to the workshops and training sessions set up during the season;
- **Structuring:** regular meetings with the information resource officer on topics related to legal aspects;

- **Development strategy:** around the artistic project, which actions to carry out, which articulation, which timing, finding concert dates, work methodology;
- **Communication:** regular follow-up (two to three sessions with the communication officer) with each group, including a profile study of each project, as well as methodology and communication tools (website, social networks).

In addition, each of the groups is brought to participate in the *Day of Information and Meetings Around the Current Music* in order to meet professionals in the sector and to be formed around axes or specific activities (labels, turners, setting up a tour, etc.). At the end of each support period, the groups perform on the *L'Échonova* stage for a restitution concert.

For musicians already in the process of professionalisation, since 2015, they have been accompanied by the device #Go. The groups participating in this scheme must be in the process of professionalisation or have a serious artistic project with clear objectives. There are no age limits in this scheme, and candidates must provide a file and a letter of motivation detailing their objectives and the means they will need to achieve them. Within the framework of #Go, not only is a more advanced work on the pre-production of albums put in place, but also an artistic accompaniment of the performance on stage is part of the work axes throughout the year. Together, 64 artists have been accompanied by one of the professionalisation programmes since 2010, involving 157 hours of accompaniment per year on average.

Professional musicians are invited to regular artistic residencies, which allows them to work in privileged stage conditions. These residencies are generally a time of creation or preparation for a tour and allow the musicians to work together (concrete space setting, sound arrangement, light creation). Around these residencies, cultural actions are carried out on the territory in order to confront the population with the work of creation. Since 2010, 46 artists have completed residencies (an average of 5 days) at *L'Échonova*. Moreover, among the 98 artists programmed on average every year, more than 1/3 are from the region. Indeed, priority is given to artists of the urban area of Vannes, then to the Breton groups. As the local production is sufficiently varied and qualitative, it is possible to programme these groups in support of artists having national or international notoriety. As has already happened on several occasions, the idea is to allow these artists to become known and to be reprogrammed during concerts elsewhere in France and abroad.

Cultural actions

Some of the most innovative and emancipatory actions within *L'Échonova* are classified under the label of 'cultural actions.' Cultural actions are projects, often carried out in partnership with other institutions, that have music as a background but seek above all to propose new ways of approaching subjects as different as the teaching of English or awareness of noise exposure. We will not present in the following the totality of the cultural actions already implemented by *L'Échonova*, but those that have had a longer duration or a greater impact.

Lyrics

The *Lyrics* project was launched in December 2012 in partnership with the *Conseil Général du Morbihan* and the MAPL (a SMAC in Lorient); it consisted of the setting up of seven workshops

for the creation of songs in English supervised by artists within seven junior high schools of the department. This cultural action continued to develop in 2013 and was extended to fifteen colleges. The students wrote the texts in English, accompanied by professional musicians, and chose different styles of music, such as dub or reggae, blues-electro, rock, pop, hip-hop, or folk. In addition to learning about the work of creation and composition, the students also discovered the preparation that a recording requires. The projects are intended to be 'far from the star system'. The students have easy access to them, but this access is based on a cultural opening of the world in general and current music.

In 2015, a concert was organised, bringing together all the projects of the Morbihan department, which consisted of 278 students and 12 artists. Lyrics were described as a collective experience, allowing cohesion within the classes. In 2019, there were ten colleges involved in the project spread throughout the department, 217 students and teachers participating in class groups or voluntary groups, and twenty hours of intervention and workshops for each class.

Rêverie Moderne

The 1st edition of *Rêverie Moderne*, accompanied by a specific communication plan under the impulse of *L'Échonova*, took place in 2013 for three days at Suscinio's Castle (a Breton castle, built in the late Middle Ages, to be the residence of the Dukes of Brittany). The project was characterised by the association of heritage, current music, digital arts, videos, and interactive installations with the aim of modernising the castle's off-season programming for a wide audience thanks to the presence of seven artists and three installers. In 2016, 700 spectators were present in the courtyard of the castle for a headphone concert, the installation 'Refraction' with light games, workshops, and an electronic picnic. Financed by the departmental council and by *Morbihan Patrimoine*, the project was a success and lasted for five years before being stopped in 2018 due to a change of delegate of the Suscinio's castle, wishing to refocus the animations present in the castle on the medieval history of the place.

Music in prison

On November 9, 2010, a first concert initiative took place at the men's prison in Vannes with the group Soadan, in partnership with the *Ligue de l'enseignement*, followed by an exchange with the group. The Music in Prison Project was launched in 2012 in order to extend the cultural offer and allow everyone to access artistic practices related to current music. This initiative, cutting the isolation of the prisoners, was proposed by the Vannes prison. Three slam workshops were set up with the artist Youn (starting with three participants). The project ended with a spoken word concert by the artist on the day of the music festival (with about thirty participants).

In 2013, six musicians from *Le Cercle* performed in front of about fifty inmates. The artists who have performed over the years testify to a good reception from the inmates. In 2018, a concert had 53 participants, and beat-making and hip-hop writing workshops had seven participants. In 2019, *L'Échonova* and the *Ligue de l'enseignement du Morbihan* organised a two-day music workshop with six inmates. It ended with a blues concert, at the end of which the inmates exchanged words with the artists: 'Thank you for introducing us to the blues', 'The feeling passed; we are a tough audience!' (*L'Échonova*, 2019).

Peace & Lobe

From November 7 to 10, 2011, the first edition of seven *Peace & Lobe* sessions was launched with 1,500 schoolchildren in partnership with the non-profit health insurance *Mutualité Française de Bretagne*. The programme focused on the prevention of hearing risks. In 2016, 1,130 schoolchildren attended a performance of the show.

Marine Le Grogne, prevention officer at the *Mutualité Française de Bretagne*⁶, explains that the concert is a better way to address the issue with young audiences. It should be noted that the prevention advice is aimed both at the audience and the musicians. The objective is to develop an awareness of the auditory risks and to develop the appropriate reflexes. The approach is also supported by the Regional Health Agency.

Music Act

Created in 2011, *Music Act* brings together cultural events programmed by *L'Échonova*: screenings, philosophical meetings, conferences... The project's initial aim was to discover musical trends through exhibitions and documentary screenings. It changed course in the fall of 2013 after having tackled all the aesthetics of current music. From that year on, the programme has been described as 'a time of reflection on the relationship with music'. Its aim is to observe how music feeds other arts (cinema, video games, gastronomy, etc.), permeates the culture of a country (Italy, Iceland, etc.), and impacts the way of life (e.g. the place of women in current music). In 2019, there were 865 participants in the two editions of *Music Act*. A total of 27 actions were organised (conferences, exhibitions, workshops, etc.) through twelve partner places spread in six municipalities. Also, 15,000 copies of the programme were distributed on average over the department and in strategic locations in the main major cities of the Brittany region. In 2018, the events were no longer only intended for the general public but were also proposed for schools, IMEs (institutions for children with intellectual disabilities), and leisure centres.

A concrete example of a project organised within the framework of the *Music Act* is the headphone concert on May 4, 2019, around the theme of music and health. Headphone concerts are a kind of musical nap during which the headphone device allows you to fully immerse yourself in the artistic proposal and to appropriate a moment of relaxation for yourself. The headphone concert followed a shared barbecue, allowing 18 participants to discover a facet of electronic music in a special setting and conditions.

⁶ *Mutualité Française* is a federation of mutual health insurance companies in France.

Analysis

An ambivalent identity

One of the main challenges of *L'Échonova* is related to the singular place it occupies in the landscape of regional performance venues, marked by a large predominance of small private venues and the existence of a few public theatres hosting larger (seated) concerts. In this context, *L'Échonova* occupies an ambivalent position: on the one hand, it is assimilated to public theatres by its funding, the constraints that the public framework imposes on its operation and an underlying logic of public service; on the other hand, it is assimilated to private concert halls by the nature of its activity (music concerts), a less formal dynamic of the use of spaces, its openness to amateur artists and the presence of volunteers.

This ambivalent position results in an ambivalent identity: *L'Échonova* is often described in a one-sided way, including by artists and volunteers: it is compared either to private concert halls or to theatres (more rarely). This comparison is, moreover, depreciative, since, compared to private venues, *L'Échonova* is considered less 'dynamic'. It has a more restricted programming (less than one concert per week) and this programming is stronger in the 'off-season'. As Mathilde⁷ (a professional musician, 42, who has already been coached by *L'Échonova*) pointed out, 'the thing is that *L'Échonova* is too big, too slow and too empty...they have a lot of equipment - if you saw what they have in terms of lighting! - that they don't even use. You look at a space like *Le Roobata* [a café/concert venue 40km away from *L'Échonova*, featuring an audience of less than 100 people, which holds about 150 concerts a year]. The guys have little space, but they do plenty of stuff all year round, whereas here it is really sad.'

Marc (architect, 53, resident of the urban area who has attended several concerts at *L'Échonova*), points out that the municipal theatre of Vannes would be a better example of a public facility because it coexists with the municipal library and has a larger programme than *L'Échonova*. When asked what he thought the challenges of *L'Échonova* would be, he said, 'I think it would be important for *L'Échonova* to have a stronger policy than it does today. It would be important for it to be noticed and that the space is better used...like, part of the jazz concerts of the Palais des Arts [Vannes municipal theatre], should take place at *L'Échonova* in order to make better use of this space...we divide it, the theatre hosts the plays, the concert hall the musical shows.'

What we noticed in Mathilde's and Marc's comments is that neither of them grasped the specificity of *L'Échonova*, neither in terms of the project's objectives nor in terms of the infrastructure's dimensions. This brings us to the weakness of communication.

⁷ The names used are fictitious and aim to preserve the identity of the interviewees.

Lack of communication

One of the major difficulties of *L'Échonova* is its communication. Certainly, thousands of euros are spent each year on the printing of the programme of the concerts, posters placed in several places of the agglomeration, a Web site containing the information on the concerts and the principal programmes developed, and several annual visits by the local press. However, the communication about the structure and its artistic project is limited, not very didactic, and uses a rather institutional language. For example, it is not enough to indicate in the communication materials that '*L'Échonova* is a facility of the Golfe du Morbihan-Vannes agglomeration whose management has been entrusted to the R.E.M.A. (EPIC) administered by a Board of Directors' (*L'Échonova*, 2022) and that they count with the support of numerous public organisations, whose logos are displayed at the bottom of the page. As Joana (a 47-year-old teacher, resident of the agglomeration, who has attended several concerts at *L'Échonova*) stated when asked what *L'Échonova* was, 'it is a community hall with rehearsal spaces.' However, unlike community halls in France (i.e. multi-purpose spaces made available to citizens for all types of events, from club meetings to weddings), *L'Échonova* possesses a profile of a real artistic project and responds to the technical challenges of such activity.

Moreover, *L'Échonova* is not only a space for musicians but also an incubator for new artists. This was not mentioned by any of the listeners or by some of the volunteers. Another example of the challenges of communication concerns *L'Échonavette*: several of the interviewees had 'heard of it' but said that they did not know the details of how it worked and thus had never used it to come to *L'Échonova*.

Limited use of digital media

Despite the use of the internet as a space for disseminating information from the beginning of its activity, the use of digital media by *L'Échonova* is not very developed. Indeed, *L'Échonova*, like all the associative networks linked to music in the mid-2000s, was strongly anchored in the dynamics of MySpace, then the most important social network in the world. However, the operating logic of this network of autonomous blogs differs greatly from that of the new generation of social networks that have been created from the paradigm of Facebook, Instagram and YouTube: now a contending capture of users' attention and engagement is essential to making visible the content disseminated.

As one of *L'Échonova* reports states, 'Facebook has been the major social network of *L'Échonova* since 2010. But it is clear that the interface is attracting fewer and fewer new users, now positioning itself on newer social networks, notably Instagram, which is currently very popular' (*L'Échonova* 2019). Indeed, after doubling the number of people following Facebook activities between 2013 and 2014 (+4,933 users), since then the page has gained an average of only 1,247 new users per year, reaching a total of 15,258 user/likes in 2019. This slow evolution is, however, still much more important than that of *L'Échonova*'s Instagram accounts (3,640 followers in March 2023) or Twitter presence (1,137 followers). Moreover, there is a complete absence of *L'Échonova* on networks widely used by young audiences in France (e.g. Snapchat or TikTok).

The use of YouTube also remains low. Created in 2014, by December 2022, it had less than 350 subscribers. The video with the most views was a concert broadcast during the COVID-19

pandemic, reaching less than 3,500 views. In addition to the issues strictly related to the number of views, there is also the problem that videos put online consist, for the most part, of retransmissions of concerts (or excerpts of concerts) and some interviews. In other words, *L'Échonova* has not yet appropriated the digital tools as a force for creating loyalty among its audience and winning over new audiences, i.e. attracting to the concerts a more important number of spectators.

One of *L'Échonova* staff members confided that much of the lack of attention for the use of a digital communication strategy stems from the establishment's understaffing. In brief, the team is small and very busy with various tasks necessary for the daily running of the facility. They are simply not in a position to seriously develop a digital communication strategy. Namely, the development of an efficient online communication strategy would represent an additional cost, not only because it requires the specific production of content for digital platforms but also because the dynamics of these platforms require daily feeds in different formats (text, photo, video, audio, etc.).

Not always relevant support for musicians

This understaffing also impacts the coaching that *L'Échonova* offers to artists, according to the three artists we interviewed. They found this activity inadequate for their needs. Mathilde, for example, said, 'Indeed, they ask us about what we want to do, where we want to go, etc. but the advice they give us is far too influenced by the rock music context... It would have been more relevant for us to have exchanges with an external person who has a better grasp of the type of music we make and who is able to better understand what we want to do...' Similarly, Jean-Jacques (a 38-year-old professional musician who has already experienced *L'Échonova* assistance) told us that 'the time we were able to spend on stage was much too short... We wanted, for example, to play for free, just to see how it sounded, to test the repertoire, etc., but we couldn't because, for example, we had to go to a concert, but we couldn't because, as soon as we go on stage, the musicians have to be paid and, thus, it impacts the budget of the project, etc., etc.... We did only one presentation during the whole year. Sure, we learned how to play with an in-ear monitor and how to work better with our sound engineer, but that's it.'

The declining role of associations

Over the years, we have observed a shift in the role of the associations that marked the prefiguration phase and the first three years of *L'Échonova*. Contact with the associations is important because it is the musicians' networks that serve as relays for *L'Échonova* from the point of view of disseminating the equipment, the concerts, and the activities that are organised there, but also as a means of greater dialogue between those in charge of artistic programming and accompanying programs and the demands of the artists. This distancing from the associations is linked to a double factor. On the one hand, it was not prioritised by the cultural projects from 2013, marked by a desire to 'professionalise' the operation of *L'Échonova*. On the other hand, as one of the staff members informs us, this is also due to a lack of human resources to integrate associative networks into the equipment's operating dynamics.

Conclusion

L'Échonova promotes the diversity of musical expressions, allowing its audience to broaden its universe of reference through local musicians (professional, in the process of becoming professional, or amateur) who are accompanied by the structure, but also by building an audience with partnerships, schools, prisons, and others. This approach makes it possible to bring recognised artists to a region far from the major urban centres.

However, *L'Échonova's* project, as it has been carried out until 2019, has a number of limitations. *L'Échonova* occupies an ambivalent place in the landscape of the region's performance venues, placing itself within the horizon of private concert halls but subject to the constraints of a public service. Its objective is not to supplant the region's concert halls but to allow for the existence of a venue whose configuration in terms of size and acoustic quality is difficult to achieve without public funding.

This implies the existence of a very important fixed cost, which, in some respects (in particular for the general audience), may seem disproportionate to the low volume of events organised on the site (less than one per week on average). Nevertheless, as we have pointed out, *L'Échonova's* activities extend far beyond the production of shows, and it is precisely the limitations in terms of payroll (i.e. the number of fixed staff members) that limit both the volume and spectrum of activities carried out and the improvement of existing activities, notably its communication and artist-coaching strategy. Indeed, it seems crucial for *L'Échonova* to develop a more efficient communication strategy capable of making the specificities of its project more visible and understandable. It should also reach younger audiences, which could play a major role in consolidating the project and increasing the potential audience for each concert (thus reducing the observed vacancy). Likewise, this would represent a real qualitative gain for the project already in place. It would lead to the ability to better dialogue with the groups being coached and to find, when this is the case, coaches more adapted to their expectations and the specific challenges of their musical genre.

Finally, what *L'Échonova's* project shows us is that an innovative project with an infrastructure that is equal to its challenge cannot reach its potential without a sufficient endowment of the human resources necessary for its daily operation.

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