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Music Education for All: The *raison d'être* of Music Schools

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Abstract: Music schools, centres of non-formal music education, bring music to people of all ages as they work to achieve their main objective of offering practical musical training, for both instruments and voice. Their activities are centred in the town or city in which they are located, and their impact extends beyond the educational sphere: music schools are also a social force whose activities stimulate the local cultural scene. This study explores the work carried out by these schools in the Basque Country (Spain), where they have been operating for over 20 years. The analysis focuses on the range of music education they offer, their ability to respond to different demands and needs and how they relate to their social and educational environment. Furthermore, the paper examines whether music schools see other potential areas for growth and development and explores the factors that could positively or negatively impact their ability to achieve their objectives. The study adopts a description-oriented empirical-analytical methodology and applies the SWOT system. A total of 67 schools were included in the study. The results reveal the relevance of this ever-evolving model of education and confirm music schools as a key force in both music education and the sociocultural sphere in this country.

Keywords: music schools; education and society; lifelong learning; non-formal education

1. Introduction

Music schools are centres of non-formal music education whose purpose, unlike conservatories (which train future music professionals), is to provide amateur musical instruction. Non-formal education is defined as 'any organised, systematic, educational activity carried on outside the framework of the formal system to provide selected types of learning to particular subgroups in the population, adults as well as children' [1] (p. 8). Non-formal education is an alternative or complement to formal education within the life-long learning process, and often makes it possible to guarantee the right to education for all. It encompasses all age groups, although its structure does not necessarily imply a continuous trajectory. In general, although non-formal education may result in learners earning some kind of certificate, these qualifications are not recognised by the competent education authorities as being equivalent to those issued within the formal education system.

Music schools offer a wide range of possibilities for meeting the different music education needs of today's society. They accommodate a great variety of musical subjects [2,3], enabling them to provide amateurs with training and hands-on experience, as well as to detect and nurture talent in individuals who go on to pursue music professionally. These schools are a gathering place for people with common interests, and they afford citizens the advantages of music education by providing an inclusive space [4–6], promoting personal development and well-being [7–9], satisfying citizens' desire for lifelong learning [10], and serving as a venue for leisure activities.

Their main objective is to offer practical musical training, by giving pupils the opportunity to participate in instrumental or vocal ensembles and encouraging and teaching them to perform active listening and to create music. Active engagement with music at any stage of life contributes to personal development, stimulates creativity and helps build intellectual and emotional skills that can be applied to other areas of learning and which can also have a positive impact on one's quality of life [7]. It can also promote self-esteem, the development of social skills, teamwork and self-discipline. Music schools attract a diverse group of pupils in terms of age and interests and provide hands-on contact with music from childhood to adulthood. Contact with music at a young age develops the senses, stimulates observation skills, contributes to motor coordination, activates listening skills [11–13], and introduces children to teamwork and values education early on [14]. Music schools are also capable of tending to the more specific needs of adolescents and young people. For some young people, music represents a form of rebellion [15], but participation in a musical ensemble can serve as a motivating factor and represent a point of contact with family or peers. Attending a music school is a way to experience and channel feelings of belonging through participation in group musical activities. Active engagement with music in later adulthood also holds many benefits, including higher self-esteem, a feeling of competence or independence, maintaining or developing cognitive skills and creativity [16–18], and the opportunity to socialise. Music education provides a space for inter-generational interaction [19]; non-formal music schools are one of the best examples of such interaction. Furthermore, music and music schools have enormous potential to help minorities or certain social groups engage with and integrate into society, through experiences such as the community initiatives *Taller de músics* and *Comusitaria* in Spain [20], the *Orquesta Geraçao* in Portugal [21] and *El Sistema* in Venezuela. By giving members of the community the opportunity to engage with music in a group setting, non-formal music education becomes a mechanism of social transformation.

At the same time, music schools exist within the context of a town or city and take on the cultural identity of their community, becoming a focal point for informing and spreading local culture [22–24]. Their contribution to the cultural life of their communities is reflected in the activities of the music schools' vocal and instrumental ensembles, which give the public the opportunity to experience cultural enrichment through the work carried out by the schools [23]. And sometimes, when the ties between a music school and the community are strong enough, these ensembles become the leading musical force in their town. Music schools thus help to create a network of collaboration with the other educational, cultural and sports organisations in the community, as music is one of the few elements to appear frequently in collective, civic and popular activities of all types [25,26]. The autonomy and characteristics of music schools enable them to plan this wide range of events, which highlights the important social, cultural and educational role they play as centres of non-formal music education.

Support from the European Music School Union, or the EMU, has contributed to the expansion and development of music schools throughout Europe. Founded in 1973, this organisation now has twenty-five European countries as members. One of its main aims is to raise the public's interest in music education and in the work carried out by music schools in particular. The EMU advocates the importance of these schools as an essential element of a common culture and emphasises the fundamental role they play in music education and music practice. It also collaborates with members to promote and sustain exchanges of student delegations, teachers, pupils, orchestras, choirs, and other groups [27,28].

Although the philosophy behind music schools is similar throughout Europe, they are organised differently depending on their place within their country's education system, and they incorporate the particular characteristics of each country's educational context [29–31]. In the Spanish education system, as in other European countries, music education forms part of general education and is also a type of specialised education [2,28,31]. While conservatories have long had an undeniable and consistent presence in the field of specialised education, music schools did not appear in Spain until 1990, when the LOGSE, the Organic Act on the General Organisation of the Education System, was passed. Since then, the implementation and development of these schools has not occurred

uniformly throughout all the seventeen autonomous communities of Spain, and the Basque Country, Navarre, Catalonia, Galicia and the Canary Islands have been pioneers in establishing this model of music education.

In the years leading up to their implementation, citizens had already expressed their desire to have access to a broader range of cultural and leisure activities, including music, not only to satisfy their desire for music education, but also as a means of fostering personal and collective fulfilment. The only response provided to this demand in the past had been the setting up of a large number of conservatories, at a time when the majority demand was intuitively asking for another type of educational service which would encompass a much broader segment of society. Faced with a large and highly diverse body of students, conservatories were not always able to respond to the training needs expressed by those who attended them, since becoming professional musicians was not the principal aim of many pupils.

1.1. Music Education in the Basque Country

The Basque Country is a region with a rich musical tradition and a widespread popular music culture. This is particularly true in the case of choral music, as evident in the multitude of choirs and choral societies in the region, and the presence of important events such as the *Tolosa International Choral Contest*. As regards music education, before the LOGSE was passed, the situation was similar to in the rest of Spain, with many students attending conservatories. However, after the new law came into effect, this situation changed, since it offered the possibility of channelling part of this social demand through the newly established music schools. Based on the LOGSE, and in accordance with directives from the European Parliament regarding the teaching and promotion of music, music schools are regulated by the Basque Government through Decree 289/1992 [32]; the main objectives of this regulation governing music schools include satisfying the strong popular demand for practical contact with music and incorporating the large variety of music-related activities that exist into their course offerings. Furthermore, music schools must encourage the active participation of their pupils and ensure school-community interaction. The regulation stresses the importance of two defining characteristics of the type of music teaching provided by these schools—the possibility of adapting the pace of lessons to the interests and dedication of the pupils, and the fundamentally group-centred nature of this type of music education—and thus encourages music schools to set up musical ensembles that help advance the cultural and musical traditions of their community. The decree also lays down the required qualifications for teaching staff and the physical characteristics of music schools. In addition to regulating music schools, the Department of Education of the Autonomous Community of the Basque Country contributes to their funding through a subsidy programme, which has been renewed annually ever since the first schools opened (Order of 28 September 1993, Official Basque Country Gazette No. 217 of 11 November and subsequent issues) [33]. Thus, as in other European countries [28], the financing of music schools rests on three pillars: the regional government, the local government and users.

Since the system was established in 1992–1993, the Basque Government has authorised the creation of 86 music schools in both large cities and small towns and villages. As a result, the schools are located in a wide range of different areas, becoming a consolidated option for those wishing to engage in music education all over the region This is, to a large extent, due to the efforts of town and city councils, which, in a show of support to their citizens, create and collaborate in opening these schools to ensure that a high percentage of their population has access to music training, guided by the philosophy that all interested individuals should be able to find a place in a music school.

1.2. Basic Questions

Given the above, and considering that music schools have been present in the Basque Country for over twenty years, there is a need to form a picture of what these schools are really like, discover whether the music schools of the Basque Country have adapted to the changes our society has

undergone and determine the validity of this type of educational model. This leads us to the questions that drive this study:

- What are the strengths and weaknesses of the music school as a teaching model for specialised music education? Here, we are interested in exploring which specific aspects of these schools can be considered their strong points and which their weak points, in order to then either foster or mitigate these aspects accordingly.
- What are the opportunities music schools must take advantage of and the threats they must address in order to ensure their success? Here, the aim is to identify situations which foster the consolidation and effective running of the schools, as well as any circumstances which may prevent them from achieving their objectives, again with the aim of then either enhancing or mitigating those aspects accordingly.
- Can music schools respond and adapt to the particular circumstances of the moment? We are mainly interested in determining which elements of these schools may promote or limit their ability to adapt to the needs and demands of today's society.

Firstly, this approach will allow us to understand how each school sees itself, by providing an analysis of the organisation in which its strengths and weaknesses are identified; and secondly, it will help us build a picture of each school's environment, which will, in turn, enable us to detect the threats and opportunities that may impact the development of music schools.

2. Method

This study adopts a description-oriented empirical-analytical methodology and applies the SWOT system, a strategic planning tool [34,35] which, despite being initially designed for use in business, has since been applied in other fields, including education [36–38]. A SWOT analysis provides insight into both the subject being analysed and its surroundings.

The study, which was conducted during the 2013–2014 academic year, encompassed 67 public and private music schools located in diverse municipalities, ranging from towns with less than 5000 inhabitants to large cities with a population of over 100,000 (See Figure 1). These schools, which together have over 28,000 students and employ over 1200 teachers, offer courses in both symphonic and local traditional instruments, as well as popular music culture. Information was gathered using a questionnaire completed by the participating music schools that provided an overview of their configuration in terms of teaching staff, subject areas offered, pupils and musical ensembles, among other aspects. A semi-structured interview was also conducted with each school's director, following the SWOT system (see Appendix A). In order to determine which aspects of the inner workings of music schools to focus on in the interview, the authors consulted European experts in music education, who shared their experience with and knowledge of the subject in order to define the characteristics that identify a music school, the strengths and opportunities such schools must take advantage of (tradition, diversity of experiences, qualified and creative teachers, new technologies, collaboration with the community), and the weaknesses and threats they must overcome (political changes, financial crisis). The individuals consulted included the President of the European Music School Union (EMU) and member of the Council of MusiQuE (Music Quality Enhancement), the managing director of the Finnish Association of Music Schools (Suomen musiikkioppilaitosten liitto, SML) and the European Music School Union (EMU), and the President of the Italian Association of Music Schools (Associazione Italiana delle Scuole di Musica, AIdSM). Once the interview had been designed it was approved by a committee of Spanish experts, all of whom hold leadership positions in music schools (directors and managers). Interviews were conducted by a member of the research team. Audio recordings were made of all sessions and were later transcribed. In order to guarantee participants' anonymity, each school was assigned a random number from 1 to 67, which is the number indicated when citing the various informants. The data collected was submitted to a diagnostic analysis that determined strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and

threats, followed by a strategic analysis, in which elements mentioned by participants were sorted into categories and a matrix was created to cross the internal aspects of schools with those of their environment [35,36]. This approach allowed us, firstly, to understand how each school sees itself by providing an analysis of the organisation in which its strengths and weaknesses are identified, and secondly, to build a picture of each school's environment, which enabled us to detect the threats and opportunities that may impact the development of music schools.
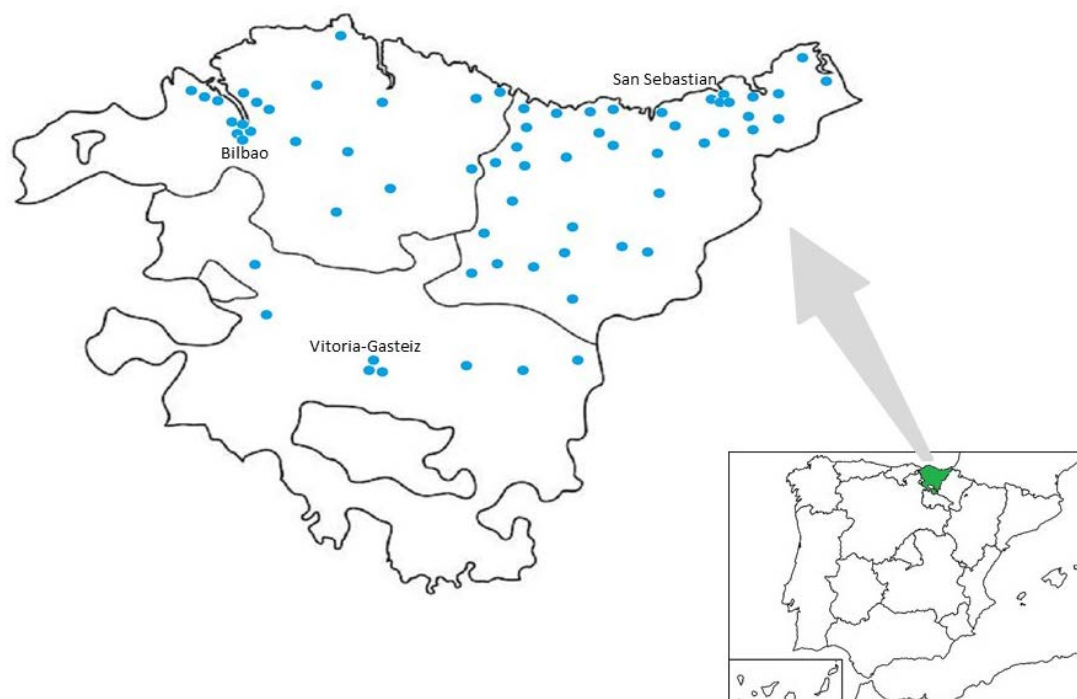

Figure 1. Participating music schools in the Basque Country (compiled by the authors).

3. Results

3.1. Internal Factors

An analysis of the internal aspects identified by the participating music schools resulted in a total of 416 items identified as strengths and 179 identified as weaknesses, grouped into broad categories of related elements. The elements were sorted into categories by means of a deductive process, with each unit being classified in accordance with the principal factors established previously by the experts consulted. The resulting categories of internal factors were the size and scope of the school; the location of the music school within the town or city and the characteristics of the facilities and equipment; the school's social impact; the organisation of teaching; the variety of studies offered; the teaching staff; activities carried out by the school (concerts and others); and pupils. All were considered strengths or weaknesses depending on each school's particular set of circumstances, with the exception of the size and scope of the school, the activities carried out by the school and the school's social impact, which were only identified as strengths.

One of the factors cited was the size and scope of the school, which 31.34% of respondents considered adequate, both in terms of subject areas and levels of education offered. The location of the music school in the town or city was considered a strength by 64.17% of schools, while 4.48% considered the location of their school inadequate. The equipment and characteristics of the facilities that house the music school were defined as a strength by 46.26% of the participating schools, versus 43.28% of schools who considered them inadequate and thus a weakness.

The organisation of the educational process and the ability to adapt teaching to the learning pace of pupils stood out as a strong point: it was mentioned by 77.61% of participating schools. However, some schools (26.87%) mentioned this as a weakness, expressing a belief that the educational process should be adapted further, especially for adolescent pupils. Regarding the variety of lessons offered, 58.20% identified this aspect as a strength, while 17.91% consider it a weakness, as they believe there is not enough balance between the number of pupils specialising in different subject areas.

More than half (59.70%) of the music schools considered their teaching staff one of their strengths, specifically because they are well-qualified teachers and regularly engage in professional development activities. Furthermore, 52.23% of music schools reported that their teachers were motivated and engaged with the school. In contrast, some aspects related to teachers were defined as weaknesses, especially as regards the type of work contract (part-time), an aspect which was mentioned by 50.75% of schools.

The number of pupils attending music schools was identified as a strength by 17.91% of schools. Indeed, a high number of pupils enables schools to better organise their music ensembles and ensures the stability of these groups. However, schools also reported that some pupils leave their studies upon reaching a certain age, usually during adolescence: this was identified as a weakness by 25.37% of schools.

Pupils' participation in concerts and other activities involving sharing music with the public was mentioned by 85.07% of music schools as a strength. Such activities introduce the public to the work that is done in music school classrooms and expand the range of leisure activities offered in communities, highlighting one of the essential traits of these schools, one that the schools themselves have accepted and incorporated into their identities as music schools. Just over half (52.23%) of the schools interviewed identified the positive public image of their school as a strength; this positive image is closely related to their participation in musical activities in their community (See Table 1).

Table 1. Identification of Strengths and Weaknesses.

Internal Factors	*Strength* **(%)**	*Weakness* **(%)**
Size and scope of school	31.34	
Location and equipment		
• *Location*	64.17	4.48
• *Equipment*	46.26	43.28
Organisation of the educational process	77.61	26.87
Subject areas available	58.20	17.91
Teaching staff		
• *Teachers' qualifications*	59.70	
• *Motivation and engagement with school*	52.23	
• *Conditions of employment*		50.75
Activities with pupils	85.07	
Number of pupils	17.91	25.37
Positive image in the community	52.23	

3.2. External Factors

Schools also identified situations and circumstances in their environment that may have a positive or negative impact on achieving their objectives. Schools cannot change these aspects, but they can use them to their advantage or take actions to help avoid them or lessen their impact. The results revealed 312 opportunities and 207 threats, grouped into the following main categories: collaboration with other organisations in the community; pupils; relationship with schools; relationship with other musical organisations; teaching staff; social impact; and funding. These factors were considered either opportunities or threats by schools depending on the particular circumstances that influence their collaboration with other entities in the community and other music-related entities (which were identified solely as opportunities), and their social impact and funding (which were perceived as threats).

Significantly, 70.15% of the respondents identified the activities carried out in cooperation with other cultural organisations in their town or city as an opportunity. These relationships tend to go beyond merely collaborating with an association to put on a concert together and often, the participation of a music school has become institutionalised to some extent, turning into a defining characteristic of the community's cultural scene. Relationships with other cultural organisations or institutions constitute another key factor, identified as an opportunity by 53.73% of respondents. In this regard there are differences depending on where the music school is located, as the level of interaction with these organisations depends on how easy it is to access them and on the type of activities carried out in each geographical area.

The implementation of activities designed to recruit and cater to different types of pupils was mentioned as an opportunity by 61.19% of schools, along with the possibility of reaching other areas of the population and offering new types of services to the town or city (focusing primarily on older adults), which was identified by 25.37% of respondents. Also, of note is the fact that the representatives of the music schools included in the study consider the relationship they have with other schools, including both general education schools (both primary and secondary) and formal music schools, an opportunity: this aspect was mentioned as such by 71.64% of schools. However, the existence of other extracurricular activities, such as sports and language classes, was identified by 56.72% of schools as an element that makes it more difficult for the music school to achieve its objectives. The public perception of music education in general, and music schools in particular, was identified as a threat by 17.91% of schools. In this regard, schools mentioned the limited amount of time some pupils spend playing music (23.88%) as well as the inadequate social status of music education (11.94%).

Another element perceived as a threat (by 32.84% of schools) is the drop in the number of pupils in certain age ranges (secondary pupils and those attending university). This aspect is perceived differently depending on the area in which the school is located, as demographic movements vary by area. Moreover, schools mentioned a number of elements related to the definition of staff qualifications, including teachers' multidisciplinary training and the importance of new technologies, considered an opportunity by 11.94%, and a shortage of teachers with degrees, identified as a threat by 13.43% of schools.

Funding is another factor that the representatives of the music schools identified as a threat. This category includes two separate aspects related to this subject: the financial contribution of the Basque Government, identified by 73.13% of schools, and the system used to determine the amount of funding provided (in the form of subsidies to schools), mentioned by 34.33% of schools. All these results are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Identification of Opportunities and Threats.

External Factors	*Opportunity* (%)	*Threat* (%)
Activities with other organisations in the community	70.15	
Pupils		
• *Pupil recruitment/withdrawals*	61.19	32.84
• *Availability of other services*	25.37	
Schools		
• *Schools*	71.64	
• *Other extracurricular activities*		56.72
Relationship with other musical organisations	53.73	
Teaching staff		
• *Staff qualifications*	11.94	13.43
Social impact		
• *Public perception*		17.91
• *Social status*		11.94
• *Time spent on music studies*		23.88
Funding		
• *Financial contribution by Basque Government*		73.13
• *Funding system*		34.33

Following the diagnostic analysis, a TOWS matrix was created and the elements identified were crossed; they may interact in a significantly positive manner (+, ++), significantly negative manner (-, --) or the interaction may be non-existent (see Figure 2).
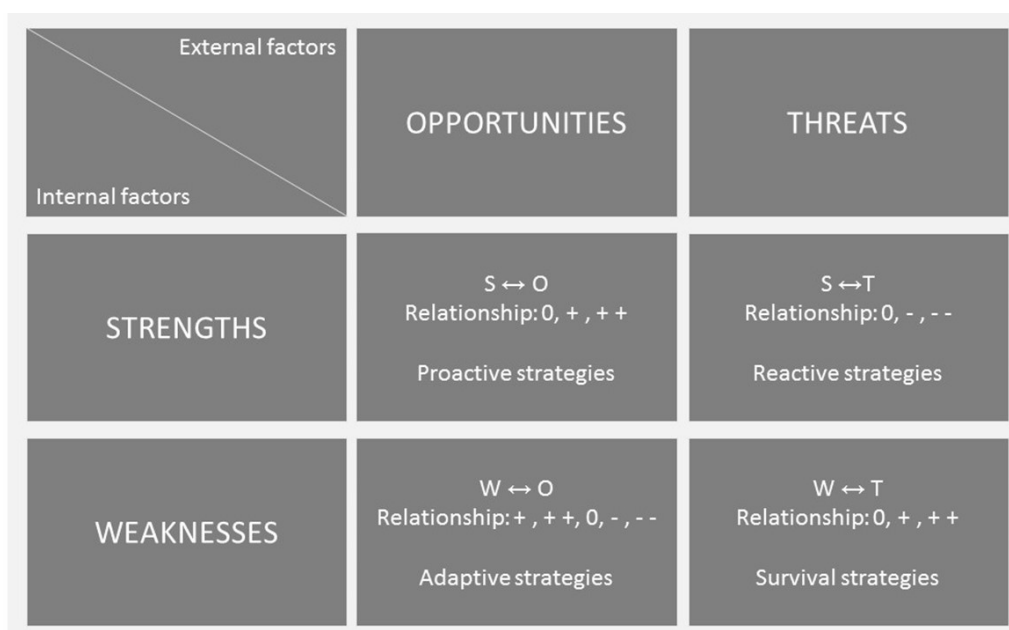

Figure 2. Influence of SWOT factors on each other and resulting strategies. Adapted from Weihrich (1982).

All the opportunities identified by schools can reinforce the positive aspects and minimise weaknesses. In order to take advantage of these situations, schools must develop proactive and adaptive strategies (reflecting the interactions between opportunities and strengths and opportunities and weaknesses, respectively). For example, some schools proposed enhancing the social component of music education, without forgetting the educational value of playing music or the enjoyment it provides, and others suggested carrying out activities designed to promote the school's ensembles. To minimise certain weaknesses identified, it was suggested that actions could be taken to increase communication between the music schools in each region, prioritising activities designed to raise awareness of those initiatives that involve the community the most. Environmental threats can negatively affect a school's strengths, decreasing its positive impact. Organisations tend to resist taking action in such cases, but it is more advisable to implement reactive strategies (interactions between threats and strengths) to combat these situations. For example, some schools suggested that their course offerings could be adapted to the demand detected, in order to appeal to a different type of pupil or to respond to a desire for a greater variety of courses and activities. Threats also exacerbate weaknesses, so defensive or survival strategies (interactions between threats and weaknesses) must be used to combat them, since modifying the environment would be very difficult. In this case, existing threats can be minimised with actions that take advantage of the resources available to the schools: for example, schools in the same area can share teaching staff if the characteristics of the services they offer are conducive to this arrangement. The strategies presented here include actions either suggested directly by school administrators or inferred from the responses obtained in the interviews.

4. Discussion

The SWOT analysis performed reveals that each music school was aware of its particular situation, which allowed the schools to define and identify, in detail, both the positive and negative aspects of their schools and environment. Activities with pupils constituted the element most frequently mentioned as a strength. Indeed, one of the main aims of music schools is to provide music education

of an eminently practical nature [3], training which, in addition to developing the individual abilities of each pupil, also provides them with the necessary skills to participate in the school's musical ensembles; the opportunity to participate in such ensembles increases when the school has a large number of pupils. Furthermore, when these ensembles perform in public, the music school contributes to and stimulates the community's music scene.

4.1. Teachers

Teaching staff was another strength mentioned by respondents. Teachers are defined as well qualified, engaged with the schools' educational missions, motivated and teamwork-minded. However, some schools see a need for a new type of teacher, in order to be able to meet the needs of the music school pupils of today. This factor may depend on the area in which the music school is located: in regions with schools that are located far away from each other, this situation represents an added difficulty in terms of fulfilling staffing requirements, especially as regards the hiring of part-time teachers and the study of low-demand instruments. For this reason, the schools stressed the need for a new type of music school teacher, with a degree of versatility that enables him or her to effectively tackle very diverse teaching situations

> ...in small schools having the right kind of teacher is essential. What is the teacher capable of? Being versatile is key. Teachers need to have a certain set of characteristics, not only as regards qualifications, but also in relation to whether or not they like their job and are motivated and enthusiastic. When you have teachers like this, many different opportunities arise.
>
> (Music school 38)

The possible existence of teachers with this multidisciplinary background is considered an opportunity for the development of music schools, as a school's teaching staff could better respond to the specific circumstances of the school and the pupils' needs at any given time, which would be advantageous for the school. However, certain circumstances related to teachers' conditions of employment were identified as a weakness by a significant number of music schools. For example, some teachers find it very difficult to attend lifelong learning activities, and many work on a part-time basis or with temporary contracts. The study confirmed that professional instability leads to less engagement with the music school and impacts course programming, leading to fewer courses being offered.

4.2. Location of the Schools

A large number of schools consider their location a strength. Schools consider being located in strategic points in a town or city (whether that means being located in a central area or being near other educational or cultural organisations) an advantage, and a significant one for music schools. This aspect, which may not seem very important, is actually identified by some authors as an essential factor in the healthy development of any undertaking of this type [34]. The available space, the building, the furniture, adequate technological equipment and the materials needed for the activities carried out (instruments and other resources) are aspects that must be taken into account in order to ensure that the education the school provides is satisfactory, for both teachers and pupils. Furthermore, the suitability of a school's equipment is directly related to the number of pupils the school can absorb and the subject areas it can offer.

4.3. Organisation of the Educational Process

The organisation of the educational process at music schools, and the schools' ability to adapt it to the interests and learning pace of pupils, is a distinctive trait of these schools and constitutes one of their greatest strengths. As the European model suggests, flexibility in curriculum design, which is specified as a desirable aspect of music schools in the Spanish regulations, is one of the defining factors

of these schools, as it enables pupils to receive musical training that is adapted to their needs and often gives them better access to new technologies. It also provides them with a musical education that is in tune with the school's surroundings. This, together with the variety of subjects offered and an approach to teaching that enables music schools to take advantage of their particular circumstances, allows these schools to appeal to a wide variety of pupils in terms of ages and interests

> ...for instrumental classes, we have a syllabus which adapts to each student's individual pace, abilities and interests. It's completely tailor-made ... the aim is to bring out the best in every student.
>
> (Music school 39)

> ...we adapt to all circumstances. We are open to everything... We usually offer a range of different mini courses in addition to the main ones...
>
> (Music school 20)

> ...We have a fairly broad offer. We have students of all ages, from 4 to 70. Yes, we cover all age groups.
>
> (Music school 24)

Indeed, music schools are aware that there is a new type of pupil, looking for a new type of service. Music education is one of the many activities that form part of lifelong learning, and music schools are places where younger and older people can learn side-by-side. They are spaces of co-existence, where achieving personal development through music is one of the main objectives. Furthermore, many music schools demonstrate a great commitment to their community by offering music lessons at an early age (for 0- to 3-year-olds), as well as music education for people with special educational needs.

4.4. Sociocultural Aspects

Involving the music school in the socio-cultural life of its community by having pupils participate in concerts and other music-related activities, stands out as one of the best ways to share the work done at the school with the public, while at the same time increasing the number of leisure activities in the community. Furthermore, a music school's participation in these events makes it more likely that the public will identify and perceive the school as an integral part of the community, which highlights the potential role these schools can play as a unifying force. Music schools accept this circumstance as one of the characteristics that define them and incorporate it into their activities; over half of the schools interviewed identified positive public perception (closely tied to the school's participation in music-related events in the town) as a strength. It is important to point out here that the relationships music schools establish with other schools or institutions in their community, including cultural associations in their town or city, and the resulting collaboration in the cultural events or local festivals mentioned above, constituted one of the opportunities for development identified by the music schools consulted in this study

> ...the music school is very well thought of in the town, because we organise many events out in the streets and always participate in practically everything. I think that, from the outside, we are very well thought of.
>
> (Music school 61)

> ...Yes, I believe it's necessary, because by participating in the cultural life of the town we attach value to the idea of leaning music. I mean, we attach value to what we are doing, to what people are learning here, and this pays off...we are also helping to generate a musical culture, as well as a culture of participation, and I think that benefits society in general.
>
> (Music school 5)

As Fernández-Coronado and Vázquez [23] (p. 49) remind us, music schools are forces that generate activity in the community; they 'are visible beyond the walls of their buildings and are in constant contact with the active players of the society of which they form part'.

To continue with our discussion of the possibilities of reinforcing and developing these schools, another significant factor is the relationship with the EHME, the Association of Music Schools of the Basque Country, an organisation which, in keeping with the model established by the EMU, serves as a link between schools and carries out different activities, including music-themed talks and lifelong learning activities for teachers. To give but one example of the EHME's work, the association participated in organising the European Youth Music Festival 2016, one of the most important activities promoted by the European Music School Union. Donostia-San Sebastián, the 2016 European Capital of Culture, was the main host city for the festival, which brought together eight thousand musicians from twenty-two European countries.

4.5. Funding

One of the factors schools most agree on is the funding of music schools, an aspect which is directly related to their configuration and organisation. The economic factor informs the most important decisions that must be made by a school, from purchasing the right equipment and hiring teaching staff to determining their conditions of employment and organising course offerings. In fact, the different official Orders on subsidies reflect the changes in the support given by the regional government, which has (or has not) provided funding for specific aspects in detriment to others (supporting the study of specific instruments, activities by ensembles), depending on the particular circumstances of the moment. Reflecting the circumstances of the times, the different regulations issued annually for subsidy programmes have included economic support for activities such as collaboration with primary and secondary schools [2,22], or for expanding schools' course offerings for people with special educational needs and older citizens. The promotion of these types of activities is in line with the official directives and with the presence of these age groups in European music schools, 44% of which offer music education for people over sixty [39]. The demand for music education which goes beyond offering citizens the opportunity to witness a cultural event from the audience, and instead gives them the chance to participate actively in making music, is satisfied through music schools. The capacity of these schools to adapt their course and activity offerings to the needs of the moment enables them to absorb all interested individuals, whether they are studying music for the first time or continuing training begun earlier in life, offering them an enjoyable activity as well as the opportunity for lifelong learning.

5. Conclusions

The SWOT system proved to be a useful tool for analysing the music school model. The questions posed in our study were answered during the process of verifying whether music schools meet their objectives, and it was also determined how these questions interact with and are related to each other. An analysis of music schools from the perspective of the schools themselves identified different components as strong or weak points and determined how these aspects might positively or negatively impact the schools' growth, meeting the first of the study's objectives, i.e., to determine which characteristics of these schools ensure their success within the education system and contribute to their capacity to adapt to the changing needs and demands of society. An external analysis, in which different factors related to the environment of each music school were examined and identified as opportunities or threats, enabled us to meet our second and third objectives, i.e., to determine how schools interact with their social environment and local educational community and to identify the different situations that may have a positive or negative impact on them achieving their aims.

Based on these results, it can be concluded that despite the existence of weak points and threats, music schools in the Basque Country are firmly established and closely tied to their communities. In the years since the first music schools were founded in the Basque Country, they have been following

the European model of music schools ever more closely, adapting to the concrete needs and specific circumstances of their environment. The contributions these schools make to local cultural life is the reflection of their interaction with their community, and the personal and material resources invested in music schools have a great social return, as members of the community gain enrichment and enjoyment from these schools' activities. The current situation paints an optimistic picture of the future, one in which music schools are integrated into a system that provides them with the economic security they need in order to continue to carry out their function within the education system and society. Thanks to their firm commitment to a more socially-oriented approach to education in the future, music schools stand out as the best type of school to offer music education for all and to address the needs of a changing society, a mere recognition of a status they already have.

Finally, this study was carried out on a representative number of schools, which gave us a detailed picture of the current context of music schools in the Basque Country. However, it would have been interesting for the project to have been able to cover all music schools in order to obtain a more complete overview of their status in this autonomous community. Despite this, however, the study paves the way for future research projects, which, using this methodology, can be applied to other regions.

Author Contributions: B.D.A. designed the study, gathered and analysed the data and wrote the first draft of this paper; M.D.-G. supervised the process of drafting the manuscript, ensuring that the theoretical framework was adhered to and assisting in modifying the questions and objectives of the study. She also edited the manuscript.

Appendix A. Guide for the Semi-Structured Interview

The aim is to identify factors that represent the strengths and weaknesses of the school from the internal point of view and the threats and opportunities for the centre from the external point of view. The following are some aspects that may be considered:

Internal factors: academic organisation (teaching organisation), by levels, modules, etc., Pedagogical Plan, teachers (training, certification, type of employment contract), the equipment of the music school, support of the city council (if any), parents (association), activities with students, teachers' activities, etc.

External factors: funding. The chance to propose activities targeted at another school, institution or municipality, or even another target audience. Who promotes such activities? Relationships with other kinds of schools, other music schools, other institutions, such as opera companies or orchestras, the Association of Music Schools of the Basque Country (EHME), and cultural associations in the municipality. Another factor may be the increase or decrease in the number of students (by age or for any other reason).

SECTION 1: INTERNAL FACTORS (Definition of strengths and weaknesses)

1. SIZING AND DEFINITION OF THE MUSIC SCHOOL

Do you think the size of the school, in terms of number of students and teachers, and specialist areas and levels on offer, is appropriate for your municipality? Do you think is there an adequate management model for the school? Would you define this as a strength or as a weakness?

2. BUILDINGS AND EQUIPMENT

Do you think the location of the music school is suitable? Is it a single or multi-site school? Does it have specially-adapted areas for each type of activity (teaching, administration, activities with students, etc.)? Does the school have other facilities in the municipality (public or private) where it can carry out its activities? Would you define this as a strength or as a weakness?

In your opinion, is the classroom and school equipment in general adequate for needs of the music school? Do you think there is enough available floor space for each type of activity (classrooms, auditoriums, library, office space, etc.)? Would you define this as a strength or as a weakness?

3. TEACHING ORGANISATION

Do you think the organisation of teaching activities, as expressed in the school's Pedagogical Plan, is in sync with the reality of its local environment? Would you highlight any particular item

in the Pedagogical Plan (flexible arrangements for courses or modules, open enrolment throughout the course, ability to adapt to the student's pace of learning, academic results, offering formal and non-formal education, teacher/student ratio, subject configuration, definition of learning levels, etc.)? Would you say that the school's organisational model is appropriate? Would you define this as a strength or as a weakness?

4. OFFER

How would you define the range of music specialties offered by your school? Are areas such as dance, group activities, music styles or remedial teaching contemplated in the offer? Do you consider the number of students per subject (or instrument) to be well-balanced and in keeping with the school's objectives? Does your school also offer specialties such as music therapy and activities for the elderly, etc.? Would you define this as a strength or as a weakness?

5. FACULTY

What qualities do the teachers at the school have? Do you consider them to have adequate training? Do you believe that the subjects they teach are appropriate to their qualifications? Is there a culture of teamwork among the teachers at your school? Do they participate regularly in training sessions, either as instructors or students? How would you define the role of teachers at the school, including those employed on a part-time basis or under other working conditions? How do working conditions affect the teachers' role? Would you define this as a strength or as a weakness?

6. ACTIVITIES WITH STUDENTS

Do you think that the activities carried out with students (performances, concerts, etc.) are enough? Do you think they might be useful when advertising the music school in your municipality? Are they held only in enclosed places or in open areas also? Does the school participate in activities with other music schools (in other municipalities or regions, or even abroad)? Do students participate in stable ensembles run by the music school? Is the percentage of students at your school who participate in musical groups appropriate? Would you qualify the existing musical groups as sufficient and/or outstanding? Do you engage in any other activities with students, such as music camps, etc.? Would you define this as a strength or as a weakness?

7. STUDENTS

How would you define the path followed by your students in accordance with age? Is there a greater number of dropouts in any one group in particular? Is there any instrumental specialty that is suffering a setback or an increase in demand? Would you define this as a strength or as a weakness?

8. REPERCUSSIONS OF THE SCHOOL

In your opinion, what image does your music school have in your municipality, and what role does it play? Is it involved in the recovery and dissemination of cultural traditions in your town or region? Do you have any kind of relationship with associations (including parents' associations) or cultural institutions, or with other schools in your local area? What degree of importance is attached to these issues? Would you define this as a strength or as a weakness?

9. What other aspects inherent to the school would you consider to be strengths and/or weaknesses?

SECTION 2: EXTERNAL FACTORS (Identification of opportunities and threats)

10. Taking into account the specificity of the school, which of the factors listed below may encourage or limit the achievement of its aims? Why?

10.1. COLLABORATION WITH OTHER INSTITUTIONS IN THE MUNICIPALITY

Relationship (through the participation of musical groups) with associations and cultural entities in the municipality (dance groups, bands, etc.)

Collaboration with other institutions (senior centres, senior citizen organisations, etc.)

Being known for participating in other municipalities or organisations

Participation in cultural events (fun runs, festivals, etc.)

10.2. NEW USERS

New target audience attending the music school (kindergarten children, adults, senior citizens, young people, etc.)

Drop in a particular kind of student (school-age children, adults, senior citizens, young people, etc.)

New types of services in the municipality (extracurricular activities at schools, senior citizen therapy, etc.)

Other factors: participatory society, expansion of new technologies

10.3. RELATIONSHIPS WITH SCHOOLS

Relationships with schools in the municipality

Relationships with music teaching centres (public and private, formal and non-formal, professional and higher education conservatories)

Transferring students to formal music education (conservatories)

Existence of other music schools or conservatories in the municipality

Existence of musical or other extracurricular activities in the municipality

Existence of other non-musical extracurricular activities in the municipality

10.4. RELATIONSHIPS WITH OTHER MUSIC INSTITUTIONS

Relationships and collaboration with cultural institutions: OSE (Basque National Orchestra), BOS (Bilbao Symphonic Orchestra), ABAO, (Bilbao Association of Friends of the Opera), etc.

Relationships with Association(s) of Music Schools, Choir Federations, bands, orchestras, etc.

10.5. SOCIAL CONSIDERATION OF MUSIC LEARNING

Time that students dedicate to the study of music

Participation of the families

Social demand for music education

Social outreach of music education (in music schools)

10.6. SOCIAL IMPACT

Being well-known in the municipality

Being part of the sociocultural life of the municipality

10.7. MUSIC SCHOOL FUNDING

The Basque Government funding

The funding system provided by the Basque Government

The effects of the economic recession

10.8. FACULTY

Teacher training

Multidisciplinary profile

Available technological resources

11. What other factors outside the music school may benefit or hinder its development?

12. In relation to the aforementioned factors, both internal and external, which might require intervention in the short term? And which might require medium to long-term intervention?

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