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The social impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on portuguese philharmonic bands

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Abstract: Cultural associations, essential in Portuguese society [1;2], faced several impacts due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The Philharmonic Bands experienced a complete halt from March 2020, resuming in a limited capacity only in the second half of 2021. This led to serious social issues, as the associations were prevented from carrying out any activity, causing disinterest among some musicians to return after almost two years of interruption. This unprecedented study aims to understand the social impacts that the COVID-19 pandemic caused on Portuguese Philharmonic Bands.

To achieve the proposed objective, a questionnaire was developed for all philharmonic bands in Portugal (Continental and Insular), obtaining 350 responses from Association Leaders, Artistic Directors (Conductors), and Musicians from more than 200 associations. Thus, gaining a comprehensive and in-depth understanding of the actual situation of philharmonic bands in Portugal after the pandemic was possible.

The results show that the COVID-19 pandemic had significant impacts on Portuguese philharmonic bands, particularly in terms of sociability, with some cases observing a high number of associations struggling with human resources issues, recognising that the stoppage caused by the pandemic resulted in the breakdown of ties between musicians and the institutions.

Within the scope of public policies for the cultural sector, it is crucial to support the philharmonic bands, often the only cultural and social strut in more remote locations of Portugal, contributing significantly to the dynamism of communities. Recognition and support from municipalities are fundamental, with the creation of financial support lines and community involvement essential to ensure the survival of these institutions, but integrating philharmonic bands into cultural governmental strategies is imperative to ensure their survival and foster cultural vibrancy in even the most remote areas of Portugal.

Keywords: The COVID-19 Pandemic; Social Impact; Philharmonic Bands, Portugal

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