

**Theses of doctoral (PhD) dissertation**

**An Empirical Study of  
Adult Community Music Learning  
in the Context of Hungarian Wind Bands**

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## **Research Aims and Scope of the Study**

Wind bands, as a central pillar of community music, have long been a familiar concept in Hungary as well. Nevertheless, their cultural and societal impacts have received surprisingly little academic attention to date. This kind of neglect is likely not unfamiliar to musicians and conductors experienced in wind music, as concert band repertoire has traditionally occupied a somewhat marginal position within both music history and the broader musical life of the present. As a result, it has received far less scholarly focus than its cultural and social significance would warrant. The situation is further complicated by the persistence of numerous misconceptions and stereotypes surrounding wind ensembles – ideas that not only divide the general public but often spark disagreement even among professional musicians.

In recent decades, international discourse has increasingly embraced the perspective that learning should not be understood solely within formal educational settings but must also account for the significance of community-based and artistic activities. Research in the fields of community music-making (Veblen & Olsson, 2002) and adult music learning (Coffman, 2002; Jutras, 2011) has shown that making music together offers more than aesthetic or recreational value, as it also serves as an important space for learning and socialization. Adult

engagement in such artistic practices has been linked to enhanced personal well-being, enriched social relationships, strengthened identity construction, and greater social integration (Coffman, 2009; Williamson & Bonshor, 2019). Building on this international line of inquiry, the present study explores the practice of adult community music learning in Hungary, with a specific focus on the case of amateur wind bands.

The educational orientation of our research is justified by its primary focus on exploring the characteristics of adult music learning, as well as on analyzing both the direct and indirect effects of active musical engagement on individual motivation and community development. These processes of learning and socialization are examined here through the lens of Hungarian amateur wind bands. From a national perspective, very few scholarly works have addressed the broader functions of wind music within the Hungarian musical landscape. The relevance and innovative nature of our research are reinforced by the limited availability of reliable data on these ensembles. This is particularly true when narrowing the focus specifically to individual band members. Musicians involved in Hungarian wind bands may have first-hand experience of lasting friendships, strong ensemble bonds, and the special atmosphere of musical events. However, before this study, no reliable data were available on the socio-economic and demographic profile of the participants. Furthermore,

little was known about what motivates individuals to pursue this musical hobby, how they perceive wind bands as musical communities, or what role wind bands currently occupy within the national music scene.

It is also worth considering that adult amateur musicians often face external challenges that their younger peers may not yet encounter. As individuals progress through higher education, enter the workforce, or later assume family responsibilities, it becomes increasingly difficult to sustain regular involvement in wind band activities, which require consistent rehearsals and concert participation, not to mention time dedicated to individual practice at home. One of our central research questions addresses this phenomenon: what is the driving force or motivational factor that leads adult amateur musicians to remain actively engaged in such ensemble work? Our goal is to provide answers to these questions through our research, which aims to fill an existing gap in the literature and contribute to a deeper understanding of this underexamined segment of the musical landscape, as well as the specific characteristics of adult music learning. We also hope that the structure, methodology, and findings of this study will serve as a reference point not only for understanding wind band communities, but also for the investigation of other types of performing or creative arts communities.

## **Theoretical Background**

It is now scientifically confirmed that active musical engagement positively affects mental and physical health. It improves concentration and cognitive abilities (Kokas, 1972; Barkóczi & Pléh, 1977), and these benefits are observable in the short term and clearly demonstrated in the long term (Schellenberg, 2005). Musical activity also supports mental and physical well-being (Asztalos, 2016) and plays an important role in personality development (Bácskai et al., 1972) as well as in enhancing emotional intelligence (Váradi et al., 2024).

Although music learning and its effects are often associated with childhood and adolescence, recent decades of research have confirmed that the benefits of musical engagement are also evident in adulthood, making its scientific study both justified and necessary (Coffman, 2002). Research on adult music learning tends to cluster around several key thematic areas. One major area is the relationship between active musical engagement and quality of life (Coffman & Adamek, 1999; Cohen, Bailey & Nilsson, 2002; Williamson & Bonshor, 2019). These studies typically explore how musical activity contributes, directly or indirectly, to individuals' mental and physical well-being. Another recurring topic is the social and communal impact of musical activity. In its broadest sense, this includes "community music", covering amateur music-making practices rooted in community cohesion (Veblen &

Olsson, 2002; Coffman & Higgins, 2012). A closer look shows that beyond musical experiences themselves, social factors are crucial for sustaining long-term community-based participation (Coffman, 2002; Carucci, 2012; Radócz, 2021, 2022). In addition to these communal aspects, understanding individual motivation is equally important — that is, why people devote their free time to such ensembles (Jutras, 2011; Radócz, 2022).

Beyond the various approaches to adult music learning, it is also important to clarify that numerous misconceptions persist regarding the wind bands at the center of our investigation. It is still common to view wind music as synonymous with military marches and, by extension, to equate wind bands with military ensembles. In reality, wind music today covers a much broader scope. This misconception is not entirely unfounded, as military bands have indeed played a fundamental role in the historical development of what we now refer to as wind music (Hollós, 1980; Marosi, 1994). Nonetheless, the contemporary landscape of wind music has become significantly more complex.

At first glance, the definition of a wind band may seem straightforward. However, providing an exact definition is far from simple, as there are many known types and variations. In the broadest sense, a wind band is an ensemble primarily composed of woodwind, brass, and percussion instruments (Kostagiolas et al., 2015; Radócz, 2023). However, ensembles may differ in terms of

instrumentation, size, and age composition, all of which significantly influence their function, and the repertoire performed by the ensemble is also a key aspect (Dubois et al., 2013). In addition, there are formations that also include other instrument types, such as strings, keyboards, or even electroacoustic instruments. Accurate definition is further complicated by the fact that even in international terminology, a variety of terms are used to describe such ensembles (Dubois et al., 2013).

Based on our prior experiences and a thorough review of the relevant literature, we sought to conduct a nationwide study that would bring greater visibility to the Hungarian amateur wind band scene. At the same time, our aim was to establish a solid foundation of both scholarly and empirical knowledge that could serve as a reference point for future investigations. In addition, through exploring the domestic wind band landscape, we gained an opportunity to document the specific characteristics and unique challenges of adult music learning in Hungary. In this sense, the dissertation goes beyond its original objective by fulfilling a dual purpose. The study is guided by five central research questions: **Q1:** What are the social and socio-demographic characteristics of adult members in Hungarian amateur wind bands? **Q2:** What is the relationship between childhood musical education and musical engagement in adulthood? **Q3:** What are the personal motivations that

drive individuals to participate actively in wind band membership? **Q4:** How do participants integrate active involvement in amateur wind band life into their everyday routines and lifestyles? **Q5:** Does membership in a wind band offer additional value to everyday or civilian life?

### **Description of Data Collection and Methodology**

During the course of the research, we encountered several challenges, primarily due to the lack of available documentation on the subject. One of the main obstacles was that we were unable to find even estimated figures regarding the number of amateur wind bands in Hungary relevant to our study. As a result, we had no reliable way to assess the approximate size of the wind band population from which we could draw our sample. The first step, therefore, was the establishment of our wind band database named FUZEKA2023. In this nationwide database, we not only collected the names of active wind bands but also documented the municipalities in which they operate. In addition, to support further analyses, we recorded the type of each municipality, its county-level location, and the classification of the wind band<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> When categorizing the types of wind bands, we relied on insights drawn from conductor interviews (Radócz, 2023). Primarily, the categorization was based on the official name of the ensemble. In cases where this was not clearly indicative, we consulted publicly available information, including textual descriptions, photographs, and/or video recordings of the given ensemble.

Following the finalization of the FUZEKA2023 database, it became possible to estimate the approximate number and composition of musicians participating in these ensembles. To this end, we designed a short questionnaire consisting of 11 items, which was distributed to the leaders or contact persons of all 171 wind ensembles listed in the database. Data collection took place between April 16 and May 2, 2022. During this period, representatives from 109 ensembles responded to our questions, which corresponds to nearly two-thirds of the total wind band sample. Based on the data, the estimated total number of wind musicians represented in the sample is approximately 6,000, of whom nearly two-thirds, around 3,900, are adults.

Simultaneously with finalizing the wind band database and obtaining key data on ensemble sizes, we launched the main phase of data collection targeting adult members of wind bands, who are the central focus of our study. As with the earlier questionnaire sent to ensemble contact persons, this instrument was also created using the EvaSys online survey platform. We distributed the questionnaire to all ensembles included in the wind band sample and asked contact persons to forward it to those adult members for whom participation would be relevant. Data collection took place between May 20 and July 14, 2022, and was finalized with 463 completed responses. All respondents were active adult members of wind bands. Our custom-developed research instrument

consisted of 37 questions, including closed-ended and open-ended items, as well as Likert-scale statements. A key section of the questionnaire was a 24-item scale compiled partly from original questions and partly adapted from the work of Jutras (2011). The questionnaire addressed four main thematic areas: respondents' demographic background, their prior musical experience, family and community relationships, and personal perceptions of the impact of wind band participation.

A mixed-methods approach was applied in this study, incorporating both quantitative and qualitative data. Within the paradigm of mixed-methods research, this study falls under the category of an embedded design, meaning that quantitative and qualitative approaches are integrated in a complementary way (Király et al., 2014). Statistical analyses were performed using SPSS version 22. After appropriate data cleaning, several procedures were employed to explore the relationships within the data, including cross-tabulation analysis, exploratory factor analysis, cluster analysis, independent samples t-test, analysis of variance (ANOVA), and correlation analysis. In addition to the statistical components, we also placed particular emphasis on the qualitative elements of our questionnaire. To interpret the open-ended responses objectively, we used the MAXQDA Pro 2020 qualitative content analysis software. During the coding process, the thematic elements of the responses were quantified and visualized.

## Results

In our first hypothesis, we assumed that the characteristics inferred from different types of wind bands, or their regional location, might have some influence on the socio-demographic background of the respondents. This assumption was based on our intention to gain a clearer understanding of the musicians active within the Hungarian wind band scene, and to identify who these amateur musicians are who contribute to this musical world through their ongoing participation. One of the novel aspects of our dissertation is that it offers a closer look at the members of a musical subculture that has received very little attention in the Hungarian context, with a particular focus on identifying the general traits and typical characteristics of wind band musicians. Naturally, the responses to our questionnaire covered a wide spectrum, as each respondent occupies a different life situation. Their place of residence, social and family circumstances vary, and all of these factors influence their overall opportunities and conditions. While certain background variables – such as gender and age – did reveal identifiable differences, most of the key background indicators did not show statistically significant variation in relation to either the type of ensemble or its geographic location. Therefore, *our first hypothesis was only partially supported.*

Several specific data points support the general characteristics outlined above. Notably, more than one-quarter of respondents (n = 114) identified as returning wind musicians, meaning they had suspended their band-related musical activities for several years – or even decades – before resuming them due to some external or internal influence. Strikingly, more than half of the participants (n = 261) reported that at some point in their lives, they had seriously considered pursuing a professional career in music. In addition, nearly one-third of the wind band members who took part in the study currently play in more than one ensemble simultaneously (n = 145). In this case, however, a gender disparity was observed: men were significantly more likely than women to participate in multiple musical formations at the same time.

Using cluster analysis, we identified two main groups among the wind musicians who participated in the study, based on the perceived transfer effects of their ensemble membership. These two groups were labeled as Ensemble-Centered (n = 291) and Moderately Engaged (n = 171). Both clusters showed generally positive attitudes toward the statements related to wind band membership, but a clear distinction emerged in the intensity of their engagement. Cross-tabulation analysis revealed a significant difference between male and female respondents: the ensemble-centered attitude was more common among women, while a more moderate attitude

was more characteristic of men. An independent samples t-test showed that age served as a partial predictor: the older the respondent, the more likely they were to belong to the Ensemble-Centered group, suggesting that older wind musicians generally place greater value on various aspects of wind band participation. Within the Ensemble-Centered group, there was a significantly higher proportion of respondents who had considered pursuing a professional music career, as well as a greater number of returning musicians. Their level of commitment is also reflected in their greater likelihood of practicing individually and in the fact that many of them own their own instruments.

In our second hypothesis, we assumed that active musical participation in adulthood is strongly influenced by childhood music education, as well as early musical experiences. According to the data, 94.6% of respondents acquired their basic instrumental skills in a formal institutional setting, during their childhood or adolescence. Very few respondents in the sample reported having started to learn a wind band instrument as adults without prior musical training. This finding clearly illustrates that the most direct pathway to wind band involvement leads through formal music school education. Based on these findings, it can be stated that the absence of music education in childhood significantly reduces the likelihood of later participation in a wind band. Therefore, *our second hypothesis was confirmed.*

The trajectory of wind musicians' instrumental development suggests that early music education and formative ensemble experiences in youth provide a crucial – if not indispensable – foundation for adult wind band participation. Additional data also highlight the importance of family background. Fewer than one-third of respondents reported that their parents had played a musical instrument or had any formal music education, indicating that most participants did not come from musical families. Nevertheless, familial support and musical examples still emerged as important factors. Several respondents noted that siblings or other relatives also played an instrument, and in many cases, encouragement from parents played a decisive role in their musical path.

In our third hypothesis, we assumed that commitment to wind band membership is primarily driven by three motivational factors: musical, social, and recreational. This assumption was based on the theoretical framework developed by Coffman (2002). One of the main aims of our research – consistent with international studies – was to explore these factors, along with the internal and external sources of motivation that may significantly influence an individual's level of engagement with wind band activity. Our assumption was consistently supported throughout the research process, as both the quantitative and qualitative data pointed toward the same three core motivational factors. This finding is especially well

illustrated by the analysis of responses to the final open-ended question in the questionnaire. The content analysis and quantification of these responses produced a coding network consisting of 1,029 individual codes, over 80% of which were linked to the three motivational domains. The three-dimensional structure of the motivational background clearly emerged for the vast majority of respondents. Therefore, *our third hypothesis was confirmed.*

It is important to highlight that most responses clearly emphasized social and community elements, such as the sense of belonging and the value of shared experiences. The significance of the communal factor was also supported by the content analysis of the returning musicians' responses, where the majority of reasons given for resuming wind band activity were related to either social or musical aspects. Further evidence of the importance of community can be found in the consistency of results across different analyses, which showed that community values are important for all wind band musicians regardless of gender, age, education, or the type of ensemble they belong to.

Emphasizing the musical aspects of wind band membership may seem self-evident, and several elements of the study confirmed this. According to the content analysis of the open-ended responses, playing music was commonly described as a source of joy, whether that came from the experience of playing in harmony, the enjoyment

of performing in concerts, or a deep affection for the instrument itself. In addition, many respondents highlighted that playing in a wind band offers valuable opportunities for individual musical development, including the expansion of musical knowledge and the improvement or maintenance of instrumental skills.

As previously noted, in addition to musical and social aspects, the recreational function of wind band participation also emerged as a key background factor. In many open-ended responses, participants described the wind band as a source of joy and relaxation that helps reduce stress, supports emotional well-being, and provides an opportunity to escape from the challenges of everyday life. These themes were also present in the responses of returning participants. It is important to note, however, that recreational factors were found to be more important for female respondents than for male respondents. In addition, we observed a significant difference between amateur and professional participants in this regard: for the latter group, wind band activity was much less associated with recreation than for those who engage with music purely as a hobby.

One of the novel contributions of this study is the inclusion of returning wind musicians and an analysis of their motivations. Due to their unique position, they offer a particularly insightful perspective on the potential challenges and benefits of long-term wind band participation. In the total sample, more than one-quarter

of respondents (n = 114) identified themselves as returning participants, meaning that they had suspended their musical activity in wind bands for a shorter or longer period and later returned when circumstances allowed. This subgroup was asked additional open-ended questions about the reasons behind their earlier withdrawal from band activity, as well as their motivation to resume participation later on. In terms of discontinuation, the most common reason cited was lack of time, typically related to family responsibilities, work obligations, or educational commitments. Another frequent response was relocation, which often disrupted established rehearsal routines and ensemble involvement. In contrast, the reasons for returning were notably diverse. In addition to musical factors and the desire for social belonging, one of the most frequently mentioned motives was the availability of more free time. Many stated that they returned to the world of wind bands because they were invited by the community or the conductor, while others highlighted the important role of band membership in supporting mental well-being.

In our fourth hypothesis, we assumed that balancing wind band membership with everyday life – especially in the context of family and work-related obligations – may present certain challenges. This assumption is supported by the fact that wind band activity is a time-intensive commitment. Active participation in rehearsals and concerts already requires a considerable investment of

time, not to mention the additional hours needed for individual practice and preparation.

More than two-thirds of respondents (70%) reported that they regularly include individual instrumental practice in their weekly routine. However, 58% of wind musicians stated that they are able to dedicate no more than 1–2 hours per week to personal practice. We hypothesized that family environment, the presence of children, or the respondent's age might be influencing factors in relation to participation in wind band activities. Notably, 56% of respondents indicated that they do not have children, which is somewhat unexpected given the average age of the sample (35.13 years). Among those who do have children ( $n = 203$ ), a large proportion reported that their children are under the age of 18. We considered this clarification important, as the age of children significantly affects how much free time parents have. These data suggest that, regardless of family-related time constraints, wind band membership remains important in the everyday lives of many participants.

The experiences of returning participants clearly demonstrated that wind band membership indeed requires a significant time investment, as most of them explicitly cited lack of time as one of the main reasons for discontinuing their involvement. Recurring themes included increasing family and work-related obligations,

as well as prioritizing academic pursuits – all of which were linked to difficulties in time management.

Based on the data, *our fourth hypothesis was only partially confirmed*. Contrary to our initial assumption, it cannot be stated definitively that age, family background, or the presence of children has a decisive impact on wind band membership, as many respondents reported remaining active musicians despite such potentially limiting factors. Nonetheless, the experiences of returning participants indicate that time constraints resulting from various obligations – whether work-related or family-related – can, depending on individual life circumstances, lead to withdrawal from wind band activity.

In our fifth hypothesis, we assumed that adult musical engagement, which goes beyond the development of musical skills, is closely related to improvements in quality of life, particularly in terms of social and recreational dimensions. This assumption was grounded in a frequently asked question: is there any practical benefit to adults spending part of their free time participating in active musical activities?

The benefits derived from ensemble participation may vary from person to person, as they are largely influenced by individual perceptions. Many participants emphasized that the band environment contributed to their personal development. They reported improvements in their concentration and cognitive abilities. Thanks to the collaborative nature of ensemble work, respondents also

mentioned enhanced social skills, including greater empathy toward others and improved communication abilities. Although less frequently mentioned, some participants also identified material benefits, typically related to domestic or international concert tours and travel opportunities. In addition, several responses indicated that wind band participation gave individuals a sense of success and pride in their accomplishments.

At one point in the questionnaire, respondents were asked to select the three most important statements out of 24 related to wind band participation. Based on their responses, the most significant elements were clearly associated with the recreational and social aspects of band membership. Statements emphasizing the stress-relieving function of the ensemble, its role in entertainment, the opportunity to escape from daily routines, and the reassuring feeling of belonging to a community were the most frequently selected. In contrast, statements related to cultural enrichment and personal development were consistently ranked in the lower third of the importance scale. It is also noteworthy that the statement referring to physical well-being was ranked as least important, while mental health improvement appeared in the middle range. Based on these findings, *our fifth hypothesis was confirmed.*

Whether we consider the role of Hungarian wind bands in music education or their place in the broader cultural

landscape, it is evident that they receive disproportionately little attention. One of the stated aims of this dissertation was to redirect scholarly focus toward the world of wind bands through a research effort based on sound academic principles. Our intention was to highlight the social and cultural contributions that characterize the everyday life and activities of these ensembles.

Although this dissertation has addressed several phenomena that may already be partially familiar to those active in the wind band scene through personal experience, these issues had not previously been explored and systematized with academic intent. In our view, this study has demonstrated that long-term commitment to wind band membership is shaped by a wide range of factors. Understanding and recognizing these factors may assist conductors and community organizers in better supporting members' motivation and, as a result, in strengthening the stability of ensemble life. Finally, the insights related to returning wind musicians may also serve as a valuable point of reflection. These findings can help us better understand the circumstances and factors that facilitate re-entry into wind band activity and support sustained long-term participation.

In addition, we believe that one of the practical contributions of our research lies in the fact that its results not only support a deeper understanding of the wind band world, but may also serve as a methodological model for

the study of other types of amateur artistic communities. In our view, it would be worthwhile in the future to conduct a similar study focusing on domestic performing or creative arts groups, such as amateur theatre companies, choirs, or dance ensembles. Like wind bands, these communities possess cultural value and, through their community-building power, often play a significant role at the individual, local, and regional levels.

Despite the potential limitations of the study, it can be stated that we succeeded in achieving our primary objective: to place the Hungarian wind band scene on the conceptual map from an educational science perspective through an exploratory and interpretive approach. We regard this research as only a first step, as there are several directions in which the study could be further expanded. Future research would be needed to explore in greater depth the relationship between music schools and wind bands in Hungary, a topic that raises a number of compelling questions. In connection with the issue of training new generations, it would also be worthwhile to investigate the potential links between the professional music sector and the work of wind bands. In addition, it would be beneficial to conduct similar studies in the future, based on the present research. This would make it possible to trace how the position and opportunities of Hungarian wind ensembles may change and evolve over time. Finally, we would like to express our hope that this work may contribute to initiating a broader, collective

reflection on the role and significance of wind bands, and that the values of this musical subculture may receive the wider recognition they deserve.

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### List of publications related to the dissertation

#### Hungarian book chapters (1)

1. **Radócz, J. M.:** Felnőttek a hazai amatőr fúvószenekarokban - Egy pilot kutatás eredményei.  
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#### Foreign language Hungarian book chapters (1)

2. **Radócz, J. M.:** Community Bands as Social Innovation.  
In: Community Building and Social Innovation. Ed.: Boros Julianna, Kozma Tamás, Márkus Edina, CHERD-H, Debrecen, 168-177, 2021. ISBN: 9789633189436

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7. **Radócz, J. M.:** Fúvószene itthon - a hazai fúvószenekarok demográfiai vonatkozásai.  
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25. Mike, Á., **Radócz, J. M.,** Szűcs, T.: Zenei ambíciók és élettervezés a fiatal generáció körében.  
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28. Várad, J., **Radócz, J. M.,** Kerekes, R., Pótfi, M.: A zeneművészeti szakgimnazisták zenei identitásának meghatározó tényezői.  
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29. Kerekes, R., Mike, Á., **Radócz, J. M.,** Szűcs, T.: Szülői vélemények az online zeneoktatásról.  
In: 3. Zenepedagógiai konferencia : Kutatások a zene és zenepedagógia világában : Absztraktkötet. Szerk.: Várad Judit, Kerekes Rita, Kiss Julianna, Debreceni Egyetemi Kiadó, Debrecen, 20, 2023. ISBN: 9789634905080





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31. Mike, Á., **Radócz, J. M.**: A jövő zeneoktatási formája?: A digitális zeneművészeti oktatás előnyei.  
In: XXI. Országos Neveléstudományi Konferencia: A neveléstudomány válaszai a jövő  
kihívásaira : Absztraktkötet. Szerk.: Molnár Gyöngyvér, Tóth Edit, MTA Pedagógia  
Tudományos Bizottsága; SZTE Neveléstudományi Intézet, Szeged, 576, 2021. ISBN:  
9789633068335
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In: InterTalent Unideb : Absztrakt összefoglalók. Szerk.: Mándy Zsuzsanna, Debreceni  
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