

A Mapping study of the music sector in Albania
By Mikaela Minga

Policy:

- National cultural policies.
- Support and governance structures at the municipal, regional and national levels.
- Cultural council, foundations, funds, and/or scholarships

The Ministry of Culture is the institution on charge for improving, conceiving and implementing state policies in the field of art and culture. Such task is in accordance with the provisions of the Law No. 10 352, 18.11. 2010 for Art and Culture (amended in 2014). This law delineates the general institutional framework, the rules of organization, financing of art and culture and the rights and obligations of the subjects related to them.

The most important document regarding cultural policies is The National Strategy on Culture for the years 2019-2025 (NSC 2019-2025, Appendix 1). Such strategy has been elaborated in relation to economic and social aspects. It aims to operate through two main fields: the arts and cultural heritage. In the field of art, the strategy wants to be inclusive, supporting the creativity of Albanian artists, involving as many young people as possible in cultural activities and promoting the independent cultural scene.” (pp. 3-4)

The first goal of this strategic document is focused on the improvement and broadening of the cultural markets through legislation. Those that will benefit from such an improvement are the authors, artistic and cultural creativity, and cultural heritage. Among the objectives are:

- a) the reformation of the Law on Arts and Culture (aiming to include important chapters such as financial incentives for cultural activities, exclusion of all institutions that carry out cultural activities from public procurement for cultural activities, regulation of work for art auction centers and licensing procedures, regulation of the cultural foundations)
- b) the reformation of the law on copyright and other related rights, in order to update according to the legal framework, based on the requirements of the Acquires, but also to resolve the issues raised during the implementation of the current law (pp. 25-26).

At the present time, there is only a preliminary draft-law of the year 2018, for some amends in the Law No. 10 352, 18.11.2010 of Arts and Culture.¹ The Law No. 35/2016 for Copyright and other Related Rights is currently undergoing the final stage of amendment.

Subordinate music institutions under the Ministry of Culture are the National Theater of Opera, Ballet and Folk Ensemble and the National Center of Traditional Activities. The latter is specialized in the organization of a number of state-funded traditional music festivals. Both institutions are located in Tirana.

“Cultural Centers” (Qendrat Kulturore) promote musical activities on a local level. They are under the jurisdiction of the municipalities. Within this cultural centers are to be found structured musical ensembles such as the city brass band, an ensemble of traditional music, and, in some cases, a string or a symphonic orchestra.²

¹ <https://kultura.gov.al/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/PROJEKTLIGJI-I-ARTIT-DHE-KULTURES-30-MAJ-2018.pdf>

² In February Tirana municipality created the philharmonic orchestra, through an open audition for young musicians aged from 18 to 35 years old.

The budget of public cultural institutions is state funded. Independent cultural operators, non-profit organizations and actors operating in the field of culture rely as well on state funding. Other forms of donations from third parties, or from foreign organizations are not to be excluded. Yet, the Ministry of Culture remains the major financial source for musical activities. It operates through an open call for annual cultural projects.

Below a statistic for the music activities that the Ministry of Culture funded in 2021 and those that are going to be funded in year 2022.³

Year	Total	Music	Festivals	Concerts and other	Associations, NGOs Application	Individual Application
2022	185	50	22	28	29	21
2021	155	34	20	14	22	12

In February 2022, the Ministry of Culture launched “The Fund for Music Composition” (Fondi i krijimtarisë muzikore) to encourage and promote the composition of new works of art music. The fund addresses two categories: that of young composers (less than 30 years old) and senior composers. A third category is devoted to the selection of musical compositions for the commemoration of the 110 anniversary of the Independence Day. “The Fund for Music Composition” is going to have an annual occurrence. It should be noted that, since the fall of dictatorship in the early ‘90s, the interest in supporting new musical works of Albanian art music has been very limited and occasional, either from state institutions or from non-governmental organization.

On a local level, municipalities sustain local music activities. The number of the projects depend on the budget that each municipality allocates for cultural activities. Currently, Tirana is the most vital municipality for the financial support for concerts, music festivals (ranging from art music, jazz, world music, to popular and traditional music). This role is further reinforced because of the selection of Tirana as European Youth Capital for 2022.

Interest organizations:

- Interest organizations for authors, practitioners and organizers.
- Administrative organization for copyright (with associated regulations)
- Administrative organization for the right of conduct (with associated regulations)

There are no specific interest organizations for authors, practitioners and organizers in Albania. Few cultural associations have played a role as interest groups in relation to cultural heritage policies.

Copyright is regulated by the Law no. 35/2016 “On Copyright and Other Related Rights”. The Ministry of Culture monitors this right through the Directorate for Copyright and other related

³ It should be noted that this is just a rough estimation. The numbers come from the lists that the Ministry of Culture has published. Musical activities regarding the field of cultural heritage have not been included in the statistic.

<https://www.kultura.gov.al/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/Lista-e-fituesve.pdf>

https://www.kultura.gov.al/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/NJOFTIMI_LISTA.pdf

Rights. Collective management of copyright and other related rights within the framework of the law is performed by the collective management agencies (CMA). The collection of remunerations for the use of the copyrighted and other related rights works is carried out by One Stop shop S.U.A.D.A. – an acronym for: Sporteli Unik i Administrimit të së Drejtës së Autorit <https://suada.al>. Albautor is the collective management agency that represents the rightholders and distributes to them the collected revenues for using the works in the music domain. <https://www.albautor.net/about.html>.

There are no administrative organizations for the right of conduct regarding music creativity and activities. General instructions on the right of conduct do exist in the field of higher education and scientific research in Albania.

Infrastructure:

- Actors in the country with state principals; are they publicly funded/supported organizers?
- Estimation of the number of performing musicians who do not live on state funds and the contexts in which they operate.
- Existing venues with associated focus (eg jazz clubs, concert halls for classical music)
- Music studios: number, specializations, the size both physically and in terms of the number of productions/sales, etc.

The Ministry of Culture remains the main funder in the cultural sector, either for its subordinate cultural institutions, or for independent operators and non-profit organizations. Possibilities to absorb funding and cooperation projects from third parties are not to be excluded. Yet, fundraising from the Ministry of Culture and from municipalities remains fundamental. The budget set for call for proposal projects is not enough to fund all competing projects and is not suitable for every typology of musical projects. The most common ones are music festivals, concerts and live performances.

No statistic exist on the number of musicians who do not live on state funds. They operate in an informal market and live with the incomes generated from live performances. The lack of syndicate or any form of interest organization turned out to be necessary during the pandemic, when the majority remained unemployed.

The contexts in which they operate can be broadly divided in these typologies:

- 1) Private events with live music (such as wedding, birthdays and special events).
- 2) Tiny venues in clubs, pubs, ranging in an average capacity for less than 200 people.
- 3) Large venues in clubs, pubs, nightclubs, ranging in an average capacity from 200 to 2000 people.
- 4) Television broadcasting
- 5) Festivals and concert stages.

A larger part of the income comes from private events (1) and, to a certain extent, from live performance in the large venues (2, 3). It should be noted however that due to the pandemic situation the big venues of live performances experienced a drastic recession. Until 2019, there were nearly 15 venues that counted approximately 10 years of activity. Currently speaking, the majority of them are closed.

Usually the musicians are organized in bands, with a leading singer. More leading singers are involved in the case of larger venue performance clubs.

There are no venues with an associated focus. The existing venues host different sorts of concert performances or music festivals. In Tirana, the Theater of Opera and the concert hall of the University of Arts can be considered as more oriented towards art music performances, while the Palace of Congresses has been used more for popular music festivals. In the other cities, theater stages play the role of concert halls and festival venues.

A number of co-working and co-living multifunctional centers, focused on social, cultural and artistic events, host small-scale musical performances. This is the case of Destil Creative Hub, Tulla Culture Center in Tirana; Arka Cultural Center in Shkodër.

“Home personal studios” are the main facility for audio productions. There are no statistical data regarding the number of home studios but usually every composer who engages in the field of music production has one and for the most part works on its own. Usually they have two rooms: the control room with the computer software, the mixing console, MIDI-equipped keyboard and the recording room.

There are no information regarding the number of their productions. Such studios usually work on commission and mostly for song productions. Singers commission the songs, representing in this way the main purchasing power. Therefore, the success and the maintenance of the studio depends on the ability to attract and appeal to the market of successful singers.

Often, musicians own a home-studio and at the same time work as live-performer in the above-mentioned typologies.

The quality of equipment varies from the modest and economic to the more professional-grade ones for the composer-producers with an established music production. They use both analogue in digital technologies. Until a few years ago, the majority of productions were entirely synthesized, while recently there is evidence for including more live recorded elements in the final product. This tendency have given rise to the use of the studio as a rehearse room. Yet, those that offer such service are very few.

The only professional recording studio, in terms of capacities, space, design and acoustics can be found in Radio Tirana, the state-funded radio channel. Until the early ‘90s, it represented the main institution for music productions and distribution in Albania. The latter is used primarily for shows and festival productions of the RTSH (The Albanian Radio Television) and also as a rehearse room for the RTSH symphonic orchestra.

Currently speaking, the ESP Albania – Entertainment Solution Providers is working on the construction of the first private professional recording studio.

Education

- Post-secondary education
- Number of colleges, Specialized faculties
- Private education
- Number of graduates/year.

The system of music education in Albania is divided in primary, secondary and tertiary education. Primary education comprises a 5-years cycle. Secondary is divided in 3 years of lower secondary education and 3 years of upper secondary education. Institutions of upper secondary music

education are: the Artistic Lyceum (Liceu Artistik) situated in Tirana and a number of high music schools (shkolla të mesme artistike) situated in Shkodra, Elbasan, Korça, Fier, Vlora, Berat and Gjirokastrë.

The above mentioned institutions are all state-funded. There are no private institutions of upper secondary music education in Albania.

Tertiary education system is divided in a bachelor degree of 3 years and master's degrees (of 1.5 – 2 years).

- State-funded institutions:

1. The Faculty of Music, at the University of Arts, Tirana The Department of Arts, Faculty of Education at the University of Shkodra

- Private institutions:

2. The Faculty of Humanities, Education and Liberal Arts at the European University of Tirana – UET.

The Faculty of Music, at the University of Arts in Tirana is the main institution. Instigated in January 1962, the faculty has three departments: The department of Musicology, Composition, Conducting and Pedagogy; The department of Music Performance; The department of Vocal Singing.

Music programs are as follows:

Bachelor

1. Piano;
2. Violin;
3. Viola;
4. Violoncello;
5. Contrabass;
6. Guitar;
7. Flute;
8. Clarinet;
9. Oboe;
10. Bassoon;
11. Horn;
12. Tromba, Trombone, Bass tuba;
13. Classic Accordion;
14. Lyric Singing;
15. Composition
16. Conducting;
17. Musicology
18. Pedagogy of Music

Master in Arts

1. Piano and teaching;
2. Violin and teaching;
3. Viola and teaching;
4. Violoncello and teaching;
5. Contrabass and teaching;
6. Flute and teaching;
7. Clarinet and teaching;
8. Oboe and teaching;
9. Bassoon and teaching;
10. Horn and teaching;

11. Trumpet and teaching;
12. Trombone and teaching;
13. Lyric singing and teaching;
14. Composition and teaching
15. Conducting and teaching;
16. Musicology and teaching

Professional Master

1. Guitar and teaching;
2. Basso tuba and teaching;
3. Classic Accordion and teaching;
4. Music pedagogy and teaching;

Graduates

Years	2017-2018	2018-2019	2019-2020	2020-2021
Bachelor	79	59	76	84
Master in Arts	39	27	42	38
Professional Master	52	17	6	22

The Department of Arts, Faculty of Education at the University of Shkodra has been instigated in 2015 and has a Bachelor program in “Music Pedagogy”.

Graduates:

Years	2017-2018	2018-2019	2019-2020	2020-2021
Bachelor	10	7	0	6

The Faculty of Humanities, Education and Liberal Arts at the European University of Tirana has a Bachelor degree in “Musical Arts”, with profile “Piano” and “Lyric Singing and a Master degree in “Musical Arts” with profile: “Piano”, “String instruments” and “Composition”. The programs have been instigated in 2018. The year 2021 was the first generation of graduates.

Years	2020-2021
Bachelor “Musical Arts”	5
Master “Musical Arts”	2

Market analysis:

- Production company; Agencies or management companies; Other organizers, (e.g., foreign) in Albania; Festivals; Other employers; Technology providers of music and stage; Music industry; Public figures on revenue stream of music and/or creative industries?
 Distribution; Music commercialization and consume; Proportion of streaming services of consumed music in the country; Radio channels (major/independent); Main genres for popular consumption; Portion of the population with access to social media; Portion of the population with access to the internet; Distribution between a physical and digital distribution; Market share between major/independent; Is there a national structure for record publishing? Is there an

established field of (formally educated) music journalism and what does it look like? Is there a geographical concentration of the music scene and the artists?

Until the early '90s, music market was absent in Albania and the overall production of the music sector was centralized. The state produced and distributed music through its own mediums: The Albanian Radio and Television, RTSH and four satellite radio channels situated in Korça, Gjirokastër, Shkodra and Kukës. Radio receivers were the principal consumerist product for people while other personally owned music commodities were the privilege of a few.

Three main genres existed during the regime: art music, *muzika popullore* (a repertoire consistent of folk or urban tunes and newly-composed songs based on traditional idioms) and light song (*kënga e lehtë*). The Radio-television recording studio (and partially the ones of Radio Shkodra and Korça) served as the only means by which these musics could be recorded. Successively state airwaves or live music ensembles were the means for their distribution.

Festivals represented the most significant performance institution in musical life. The main ones were the National Folklore Festival of Gjirokastër (held every 5 years in the city of Gjirokastër) and the Festival of light song in RTSH (an annual competition, instigated from 1962). Both activities have been preserved after the fall of the dictatorship.

In the post-socialist period, the centralized character of music production and distribution begun to gradually crumble, leaving space for a number of developments that, through time, displayed the lack of a necessary infrastructure able to support and sustain the growth of a stable non-state-subsidized music economy. Looking such context many musicians admit that the music market does not exist in Albania.

Currently speaking, the Albanian music market has a very informal nature, carried on by self-employed or independent actors, working on a small operation scale. There is a lack of statistical data and information in terms of production, distribution and consumption.

Compared to the western popular music industry, there are neither production companies nor agencies and management companies in a conventional sense. The same can be affirmed about the recording labels and publishing companies. Those few that carried such a name did not have the capacities for building a professionalized chain of production. Music piracy had a major role in hindering their development. No national structure for record publishing exists.

The main features of the post-socialist music economy can be found in:

- An individual-based approach, particularly evident in the forms of self-management and self-promotion of musicians.
- the rise of the composer-producer who, by way of personal home studios, introduced and standardized the digital recording technologies in Albanian popular music.
- the rise of the "commission model" of song production. The singer is the one who makes such a commission intended to be promoted through music videoclips, personal live performances, competition at song contests, radio play and recently, digital music streaming platforms and social media.
- the proliferation of a prosumer market for recording technologies.
- the ascendancy of music piracy, both for foreign and national music products (regarding cassettes or CDs)
- rise of private radios and tv music channels, as well as private song contests.

In the latest thirty years of post-socialist, different music genres have flourished and are consumed primarily within Albanian speaking populations. The existent categories of “light song” and “muzika popullore” have been profoundly reshaped through electronic arrangements and the decentralized nature of music production and consumption. Alongside, new genres came into existence, influenced from either western popular music, or Balkan popular styles. Altogether enter within the umbrella of the “modern Albanian music” (muzika moderne shqiptare).

According to the information provided by audio streaming and online media services, the main genres of popular consumption are pop music, with mixed influences from both western and Balkan pop styles, pop-folk (tinged with idioms from Albanian traditional music) and hip-hop.⁴

The principal format for song distribution and promotion is through audio streaming services, music videoclips, personal live performances, competition at song contests and radio play. The two main song contests are:

- *The Festival of Song in RTSH*, the historical state-funded song-contest, held by Albanian Radio and Television and currently in its 60th edition. The winner of this contest goes in Eurovision.
- *Kënga magjike*, a private song contest, produced by Ardit Gjebrea, in collaboration with Klan media group

Other music festivals have been instigated in the meantime, focusing on specific musical genres such as Jazz, Electronic music, rock music.

The most prominent artists in the creative music industry appear to be:

- 1) The composer-producer, a university graduate, who owns a studio and is self-employed producer
- 2) The producer, who is not trained in music but owns a recording studio.
- 3) Beat-makers, a specific profile for hip-hop music productions
- 4) Live music performers (both acoustic and electronic)
- 5) Singers, very often divided into the ones who perform live and those who perform on playback

A number of public figures have however managed to create a multifaceted profile within the field of popular music creative industry:

- Some can be described as artist-turned-entrepreneur, moving from song-making to producing song contests. This is the case of Ardit Gjebrea (composer, producer and singer) and *Kënga magjike* (Magic song) a festival produced in collaboration with Klan private media group. The latter has had the greatest longevity compared to other song contest such as TopFest.
- Some have tried to expand the profile of the personal recording studio. This is the case of *Muza Production Company*, being conceived as a house recording studio and an academy, offering courses and seminars for various practitioners in the sound industry.
- Other public figures have combined their profile of producer, song-maker and performer, working as a group. This is the case of *Threedots production*, with Florian Mumajesi as leader of the group.

⁴ Here the link of a chart generated from Youtube streamings:
https://kworb.net/youtube/insights/al_daily.html?fbclid=IwAR23RK-OMRLzK1RZWYaYWzzyVTfCIYrUwNxc0_c_2Uk5MQvxIWYNE5MNyE4

The majority operate in the mainstream music productions.

One cannot properly speak in terms of a division between major and independent market share. Nevertheless, different young emerging artists consider themselves as independent, working separately from the Albanian mainstream music celebrity culture. However, they too have to work on their own for performing and promoting their musics. It is fundamental for them to publish with foreign recording labels. In spite of the difficulties, a small number has managed to do so. This is the case of Mardit Lleshi, Gent Rushi, Aulon Naçi and so on.

A more structured example of music making and entrepreneurship is *Undefined entertainment* conceived as a production house and multimedia platform, putting together young singers, DJs, composer-producers, live performers and multimedia artists.

In the recent years, the use of online platforms such as Youtube, Spotify, Soundcloud, Deezer, Tidal etc. has broadened the possibilities for music distribution on the international market and there is a growing interest in them. Companies of digital music distribution or generally on digital promotion and marketing have been more effective in terms of distribution, promotion and copyright. Many musicians remain however cautious and alert regarding the pro and cons of these collaboration, codes of conduct.

In light of the development of digital music distribution, the main ones have been: Priam Digital, Folé Publishing, ONIMA, ArkivaShqip and Acromax Media

During the dictatorial regime Tirana was the center of Albanian music scene. This position has been preserved also in the post-socialist period in terms of the concentration of the principal state music institutions, activities and musicians.

There is no musical journalism. The cultural sector is the most vulnerable one in Albanian journalism. Only the main newspapers and periodicals have a journalist for culture (gazetar kulture) who is supposed to report and cover all cultural and artistic events.

According to AMA (Albanian Authority for Audiovisual Media) there are 59 radio channels.⁵

There are at least four big companies of technology providers for music and stage, centered in Tirana, with an up-to-date equipment. Many musicians have their own equipment for smaller music performances.

Conclusions:

- Graduated musicians are primarily trained in art music and pedagogy. Those who work as music teacher and classical trained musicians are very few in comparison to the ones who engage with the domain of modern music-making. Music programs on modern music can be valuable. This is not meant to “train” them for entering the musical market, but to provide them with a systematic knowledge and the ability to develop critical thinking in understanding these musical realities in Albania and beyond.

⁵ <http://ama.gov.al/subjekte-audio/>

- Emerging musicians have to build their musical career on their own. As such they try to find different ways for assuring startup capital to invest for themselves. In many cases, the lack of this capital brings them to leave aside their artistic aspirations for the economic profits required for their livelihood.
- On the other side, those able to invest such capital and establish their own career, still point out the individual-based forms of self-management and promotion, the lack of music agents, recording labels and the necessity to create specific platforms for management, distribution and promotion.
- The modern music sector manages to exist beyond state-subsidies. Yet, a more accurate state policy might be applicable for strengthening those parts that are more vulnerable and stimulating those with the right potentials to improve the musical field.

Sources for these mapping study:

- Interviews with actors of the music scene: composers, producers, singers.

I am particularly grateful to: Renato Balla, Erjon Zaloshnja, Arbër Koçllari, Gent Rushi, Aulon Naçi, Vasil S. Tole, Meri Kumbe, Dorian Çene, Rajmonda Alikaj, Manjola Lulaj, Kristi Bello, Anna Shkreli, Jonida Çunga, Zamira Kitta, Sonila Abdalli, Anxhela Peristeri.

It should be noted that all the names mentioned in this study have been used just for illustration purposes aimed at a better understanding of the complex reality of Albanian popular music. Neither of them is being used as a form of favoritism, promotion and preferential treatment.

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