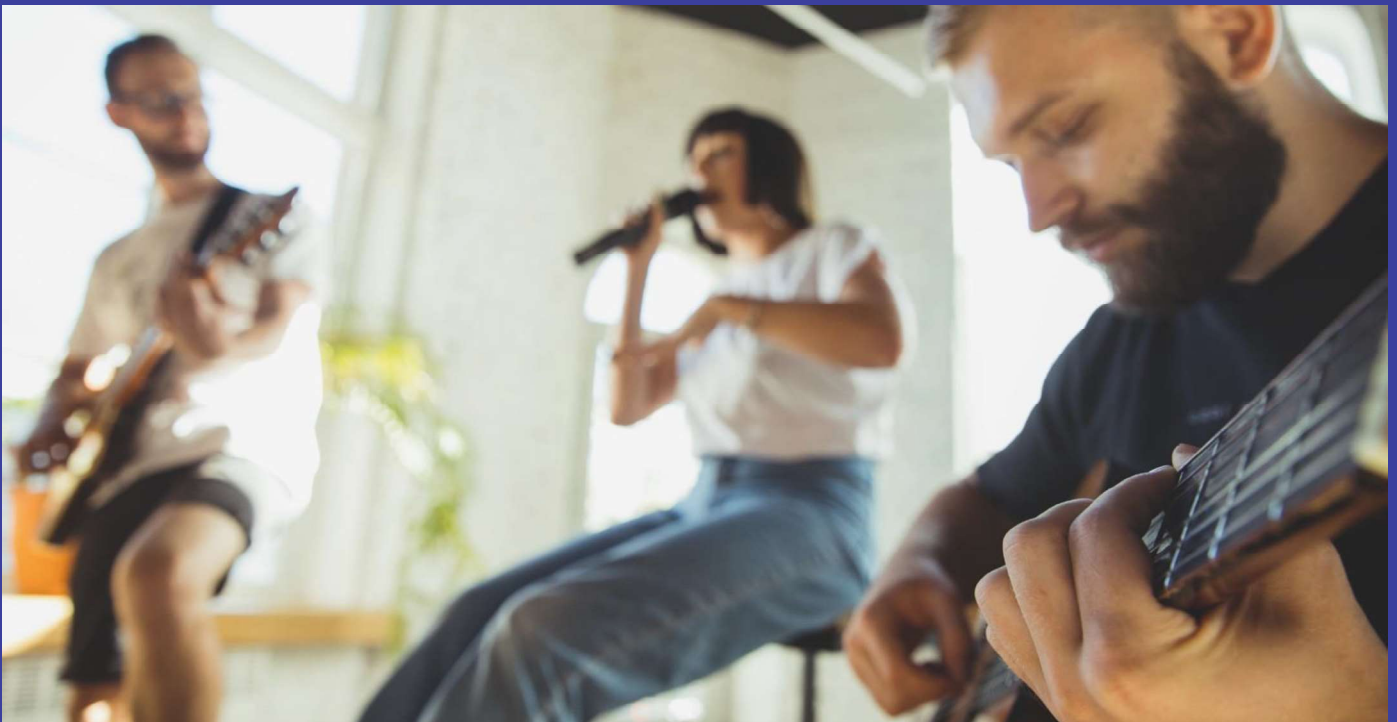


Music therapy for addiction: The FALCO project

Public seminar · Sep. 23, 2026 · 09:00-12:30



Learn more about the project:

 falco-project.eu

 FALCO project



mdw – University of Music and Performing Arts Vienna
Joseph Haydn-Hall, mdw Campus, Wing A

Anton-von-Webern-Platz 1, 1030 Vienna

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Public seminar

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mdw · Joseph Haydn-Hall, mdw Campus, Wing A, Anton-von-Webern-Platz 1, 1030 Vienna

The international project "Fighting Addictions, improving Lives: COmprehensive drug rehabilitation with music" (FALCO), named after a well-known Viennese musician whose music and life evolved around cocaine, alcohol, and cannabis, addresses how people can use music to overcome addiction. In this seminar, FALCO researchers from eight European and Middle Eastern countries meet in Vienna and present their insights.

Programme overview

9:00 *Christian Gold (PI of the FALCO project): Welcome, introduction*
 Ulrike Sych (Rector of mdw – University of Music and Performing Arts Vienna): Welcome

9:15-10:45 Presentations by early career researchers

9:15 *Heidi-Marie Meling & Emma Segura: The work of early career researchers in FALCO (1)*
 9:35 *Daria Makurat: From translation to validation: Adapting measurement instruments from FALCO in Poland (2)*
 9:55 *Alexandra Savinova: Changes in immediate craving and motivation after music therapy and other psychosocial interventions (3)*
 10:15 *Serena Gagliardi & Camilla Figini: Music-related factors and early clinical changes in substance use disorder (4)*
 10:35 Discussion

10:45 **Coffee break**

11:00-12:30 Specific topics in an international trial

11:00 *Saed Belbaisi & Christian Gold: "Palestine is different." But is it? What makes a FALCO site different — and does it matter? (5)*
 11:20 *Saed Belbaisi & Christian Gold (chairs), Anna Graf, Tali Gottfried, Laura Fusar-Poli, Lars Tuastad, Łucja Bieleninik, Antoni Rodriguez-Fornells, & Marcus Herdener (panelists): Panel discussion with international site leads about similarities and differences between sites (6)*
 11:40 *Tali Gottfried & Moshe Bensimon: How can long-term music therapy facilitate the recovery process? Exploring the experience of patients and therapists through qualitative studies (7)*
 12:00 *Tobias Aumann, Julia Fent, Martin Fritz, Ute Glentzer, Michael Kolousek, & Vera Mitaroff: Creating knowledge together in FALCO: Science and lived experience in dialogue (8)*
 12:20 Closing discussion

Participation is free of charge.

A certificate of attendance can be issued on site upon request.

Fighting addictions, improving lives: Comprehensive drug rehabilitation with music

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Programme details – part 1

- (1) Science is driven by PhD students and postdocs. In FALCO, the early career researchers meet regularly to discuss their needs, challenges, and wishes. We give an overview of their work as a group and individually.
- (2) Measuring change in mental health often relies on questionnaires and therefore depends on language. This can be a challenge in multinational trials. Translation and validation are two separate aspects. We will present Polish results for four instruments (eBMRQ, HUMS, SCI and SHAPS); further instruments are still being validated.
- (3) Research suggests that music therapy (MT) has a positive effect on aspects of substance use disorder (SUD), such as reducing craving and improving motivation. Craving and motivation are important factors in the continuation and recovery of SUD, so further research on how music therapy and other psychosocial interventions might affect these factors is needed. This presentation will include preliminary data from a quasi-randomized study embedded in the FALCO project that aims to explore the immediate effect of MT on craving and motivation versus other psychosocial interventions. As data collection is still ongoing, the presentation will include pooled data showing changes in immediate craving and motivation following interventions at baseline and three months.
- (4) We investigate whether baseline music-related characteristics predict 3-month changes in craving, readiness to change, and anhedonia among participants enrolled at the Italian site of the FALCO trial. Twenty participants with SUD completed baseline assessments, of whom sixteen completed the 3-month follow-up. Baseline measures included the extended Barcelona Music Reward Questionnaire, the Healthy-Unhealthy Music Scale, and the Montgomery–Åsberg Depression Rating Scale. Craving, readiness to change (URICA), anhedonia (SHAPS), and adverse events were assessed at baseline and follow-up. Analyses will examine whether greater music reward sensitivity and healthier patterns of music engagement are associated with reductions in craving and anhedonia and increased readiness to change, while accounting for treatment allocation. Individual trajectories will also be explored to identify potential responder profiles and candidate moderators of treatment response. These preliminary data may clarify whether music-related individual differences represent clinically relevant factors in addiction rehabilitation, potentially linking musical reward, motivation, and craving regulation to recovery trajectories and treatment engagement.

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the project
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Federal Department of Economic Affairs,
Education and Research EAER
State Secretariat for Education,
Research and Innovation SERI

Programme details – part 2

- (5) For interpreting the results of a multinational trial, it is important to understand the similarities and differences between the sites. Differences could occur in the characteristics and experiences of participants, the treatment and rehabilitation context, cultural and family factors, and the wider social and humanitarian context. Conversely, clinical needs, treatment goals, and the potential relevance of music-based interventions may be similar. On the occasion of a new country joining the project and adding to the existing diversity of the initial countries, we will ask which differences are actually meaningful for the implementation, experience, and interpretation of the FALCO intervention and trial results. The director of the Palestinian National Rehabilitation Centre and the principal investigator of the overall FALCO trial will present their insights and...
- (6) ...lead a panel discussion with lead investigators of other countries.
- (7) Music plays a central role in identity formation, emotional regulation, and everyday functioning. However, in the context of substance use disorders, music may also acquire conditioned associations through repeated pairing with substance intoxication, subsequently functioning as a cue that elicits craving, substance-use urges, or emotional dysregulation. Thus, music may assume a complex and potentially ambivalent role in the recovery process. Existing literature has increasingly recognized both the potential risks associated with music exposure in recovery and its therapeutic value as a resource for emotional regulation, identity reconstruction, social connection, and coping. This presentation describes planned qualitative studies designed to bring together diverse perspectives on the role of music and music making in recovery from substance use disorders after a year of group music therapy within the FALCO project. The aim of these studies is to examine the conditions under which music and music making may function as a trigger, a regulatory resource, or a therapeutic agent, and will be covered by the users' perspective as well as by music therapists.
- (8) Participatory research means sharing decision-making authority. In our participatory FALCO sub-project, therefore, collaboration between experts by experience and professional researchers began at an early stage: Together, we defined relevant research topics in the context of addiction and music therapy that have the potential to complement the results from the clinical study, outlined possible research approaches and methods, and identified research partners. In the next step, these ideas will be refined and implemented by the entire team.

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