

Proceedings – DE.A.RE. Project *Gathering Spells*

The DE.A.RE. Project *Gathering Spells* - Survey Report (25/05/2023), underscores a glaring necessity to establish a collaborative framework for independent cultural institutions at the European level. This undertaking integrates the distinctive attributes of every participating organization. The interviewees expressed their interest in being part of a regional, national, and European network. They emphasized the benefits of sharing best practices and working methods with other organizations. They also mentioned the importance of connecting with political decision-makers through this network. Beyond the immediate advantages, such a network offers a valuable platform for delving into the economic dimensions of collaborative efforts. The following text wishes to unveil nodal issues in cultural work and for little cultural institution, comparing available data of the project with other statistics coming from the cultural field in the EU.

What is public

From the survey, a heterogeneous composition of cultural operators who responded to the interview emerges. The organizations in which these operators work is typically of medium and small size and are sometimes led and managed by the founders themselves. These organizations engage in diverse activities, with the primary focus on organizing events, both of cultural and artistic nature, as well as for educational purposes. Many of these workers are, in most cases, independent and freelancers, but there is a percentage of employees (25% in the interviewed sample) managing the cultural activities of the organizations.

Sixty percent of the respondents claim to sustain themselves with revenues derived from the cultural institutions in which they work, while the remaining 40% state that they have one or more additional jobs. The data regarding the types of services provided by cultural organizations clarify a public or broadly public dimension of the work carried out by these institutions. In other words, small and medium-sized European cultural institutions compensate for a lack – that of cultural and educational products – and as such, they have every right to be supported with public funds. However, despite this, the survey reveals a widespread lack of funds allocated to culture and, consequently, an internal conflict within the sector leading to convoluted paths in the search for funds to provide services that were of public benefit. The public dimension and the educational and formative function of these activities, however, show us how within the European Union, many sectors – not just culture – are affected by movements of privatization. This liberalization of the cultural sector has an inverse dynamic compared to other areas such as healthcare or university education. In these latter cases, it is evident that public organizations distributed across national territories have transitioned to formal privatizations (transformation of public entities and enterprises into joint-stock companies governed by private law) or substantial privatizations (transfer of activity to a private entity).

In the case of cultural organizations, at least the small ones, we find ourselves facing spontaneous initiatives often carried out by private individuals who, while entering the market, provide services of a public nature. The very first group of questions, arise regarding what meaning the concept of public benefit holds today:

- Is culture in the public interest because it can address questions widely anticipated? (Quantitative).
- Is culture in the public interest because it can convey symbolic values? (Cultural).
- Is culture in the public interest because it can enhance social cohesion and wealth? (Social).

The most probable answer to these questions is that culture exists in the intersection of many of these motivations, to which historical and economic considerations must be added, of course. What is certain is that, at least statistically, from the survey, those working in the cultural field find their work necessary or positively impactful within the social context in which they operate. Indeed, in relation to the satisfaction status and to what extent those working in the cultural sector perceive that their work has a positive impact beyond the arts sector, 45% respond affirmatively, with an additional 26% strongly convinced of it.

The way we work

At this point, it is necessary to reflect on the methods of cultural and artistic work, connecting it to the statistical data concerning the need to engage in one or more jobs other than cultural work for purely economic reasons. These additional jobs may or may not be closely related to the cultural and artistic sector, and in some cases—especially in artistic careers—the number of people compelled to take on multiple jobs different from their primary one increases significantly.¹ This statistical data raises a new question related to the definition and conception of what is often identified as the multi-potential quality of the worker. The cultural sector is rich in workers capable of tackling different professions simultaneously. On the one hand, this choice aligns with the favour of an increasingly deregulated and fragmented labour market, while on the other hand, it exacerbates issues related to material concerns such as fair compensation, working hours, and, not least, stability. Data regarding personal satisfaction, in fact, reflects a typical contradiction in artistic and cultural work with an evident gap between the satisfaction percentages for the work done and the complete dissatisfaction with earnings. The percentages of those who declare themselves very satisfied (35%) and satisfied (53%) with their work are mirrored in the dissatisfaction with the perceived salary: 24% are very dissatisfied, and 31% are dissatisfied.

As previously mentioned, the aggregate of data regarding compensation also negatively influences the perception and satisfaction with the work performed, especially when including artists in the survey.² Same goes for the number of hours worked; the aggregate of those who are strongly convinced and those who are convinced they work too many reaches, in fact, over 80% of the respondents. This point generates a contradiction in the perception of cultural work that is closely tied to the methods, or rather the modes of production of contemporary capitalism. Here, two of the most recurring consequences in the responses nestle, forming a contradictory data. Why then do art workers

¹ Cross-referencing the data from the survey administered by BJCEM with the sector survey conducted by the Italian association AWI (Art Workers Italia), the information regarding the need to undertake jobs other than those in the artistic and cultural field differs substantially. The sector survey reveals that the vast majority (79%) of workers perform multiple jobs, both in contemporary art and, for 39.8%, in other areas. Of this 39.8%, 75.6% is compelled to do so because working in contemporary art is not sufficient to sustain themselves. Cfr. <https://artworkersitalia.it/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/AWI-Indagine-di-settore-V1d2-2021.pdf> [22/11/2023].

² Compare it with the data emerging from the survey conducted and curated by Enrico Eraldo Bertacchini and Paola Borrione on behalf of GAI and Fondazione Santagata for the Economics of Culture, published in the volume *ARTE AL FUTURO Indagine sulle carriere artistiche emergenti e la produzione culturale indipendente in Italia*, Edizioni Fondazione Santagata, Torino 2021, p. 162.

choose to work in the creative sector? Are they driven by passion? Why do they express complete satisfaction with their work while perceiving salaries that do not satisfy them? This dissatisfaction follows, primarily, an illusion: the belief that aligning one's life with one's professional desires can be sufficient. While it emerges that for many respondents, income from artistic work is insufficient both for themselves and for their organizations, there does not seem to be a decrease in those who would like to pursue an artistic career. In addition to European statistics indicating a substantial increase in employees in the artistic and cultural fields,³ during the final meeting of Gathering Spells I conducted, when asked if, under the same current conditions and given the chance to go back, they would choose the same professional sector again, the majority expressed conviction in their choice (8 out of 9 participants).

A contradiction, in my view, is based on what could be defined as the illusion of autonomy in art and artists. An aspirational mechanism that represents the rhetorical engine around which the contemporaneity of what Gilles Lipovetsky and Jean Serroy define as artistic capitalism is constructed. This sector, where production chains revolve around artistic factors that, in turn, "exploit" the figure of the artist as a reference, has generated a self-entrepreneurial narrative—according to survey data, only 19% of respondents benefit from employment contracts—that has facilitated mechanisms of deregulation of labour. Art as a system with a high degree of autonomy—in which 36% are self-employed and 25% are employees of activities nevertheless privately managed—is capable of legitimizing "creative" development models that settle on positions of flexibility. An approach to work that, in the data, reflects a passionate and "at all costs" productivity, the bill for which often falls on the worker themselves. The substantial inequality and exclusivity of this sector primarily produce ideological domains, something that is defining an artistic condition of work, or an Artistic capitalism, to quote once again Gilles Lipovetsky and Jean Serroy. A continuous experimentation with models and structures that constitutes a laboratory in which strategies for an adaptive and mutating capitalism have been cultivated. Something that, although matured in the art field, is occupying many productive sectors, defining itself as representative of the increasing weight of reputation in contemporary society.

**#Public #Privatization #Precarity #Flexibility #Fair Wage #Deregulation #Strike
#Inequality #Aspirational #Artistic Capitalism #Reputation**

Vincenzo Estremo

Promoted by



³ According to Eurostat statistics from 2012 to 2022, the number of employees in the cultural sector in Europe has consistently increased. In 2012, the number of female workers was 3,137,000, while that of males was 3,648,000; in 2022, there are recorded 3,804,000 employed women and 3,928,000 employed men. https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Culture_statistics_-_cultural_employment#Cultural_employment_.E2.80.93_current_state_and_latest_developments [23/11/2023].