Working conditions of dancers in the contemporary dance sector

EDN workshop on dance production and funding in Europe
Brussels, 17.10.2016

Delphine Hesters - Flanders Arts Institute
Overview

Observations
• Dancers as flex-workers
• A modular support system

Challenges
• Precarious working and living conditions
• ‘Inflation’ of coproductions
• Artistic careers and how we perceive them
Dancers as flex-workers

• System change: from companies with ensembles and long-term engagements to project-based work

• ‘Boundaryless careers’
  - high mobilities
  - high demands for non-artistic skills

• ‘Multiple job holding’
  - inside and outside of the arts
Multiple job holding

Performing artists in Flanders - *artistic activities in PA* (2014)

Survey research on the socioeconomic condition of artists in Flanders

Strong focus on activities and income

2016

Film, literature, visual arts, music, performing arts

- **Performing**
  - creation (own work)
  - research and reflection
  - creation (initiated by others)
  - choreography or direction
  - dramaturgy
  - creation (commercial commissions)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Done, Unpaid</th>
<th>Done, Paid</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Performing</td>
<td>8.7</td>
<td>68.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creation (own work)</td>
<td>33.7</td>
<td>40.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research and reflection</td>
<td>42.7</td>
<td>17.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creation (initiated by others)</td>
<td>11.5</td>
<td>47.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Choreography or direction</td>
<td>13.5</td>
<td>34.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dramaturgy</td>
<td>19.4</td>
<td>14.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creation (commercial commissions)</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>2.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*n = 356*
Performing artists in Flanders - *arts related activities in PA (2014)*

Survey research on the socioeconomic condition of artists in Flanders

Strong focus on activities and income

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**Performing artists in Flanders - *arts related activities in PA (2014)***

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Done, Unpaid</th>
<th>Done, Paid</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>teaching, workshops</td>
<td>2.2%</td>
<td>63.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>coaching</td>
<td>16.2%</td>
<td>34.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>production and management</td>
<td>30.3%</td>
<td>12.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sound, light, costume design</td>
<td>11.8%</td>
<td>14.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>stage technique</td>
<td>5.6%</td>
<td>5.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>other</td>
<td>2.3%</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**n = 331**
Performing artists in Flanders - *distribution of work time* (2014)

Survey research on the socioeconomic condition of artists in Flanders

Strong focus on activities and income

2016

Film, literature, visual arts, music, performing arts

$n = 347$

- artistic activities in the performing arts
- related activities in the performing arts
- artistic activities in other disciplines
- non-artistic work

59%
a story of *diversification*

- diverse ways of working
- diverse aspirations
- diverse trajectories/careers
- diverse needs
A modular support system
Parallel evolutions in the field of support structures

- Different models for support of artistic research, production and presentation
- Modular support system in order to create tailor-made solutions for diverse projects and trajectories of artists
  - Specialisation of functions
  - Collaborations
- dance companies
- theatres
- production houses
- workspaces
- management offices
- sales offices
- artist-run support structures
- …
Challenges

• Precarious working and living conditions for artists

• ‘Inflation’ of coproductions

• Artistic careers and how we perceive them
Precarious working and living conditions for artists

Flex-working =
- low overall income
- high uncertainty

International mobility adds risks - 'guest workers'

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Film makers</th>
<th>Visual artists</th>
<th>Writers &amp; illustrators</th>
<th>Musicians &amp; composers</th>
<th>Performing artists</th>
<th>Actors (2014)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Average</strong></td>
<td>24.965</td>
<td>14.715</td>
<td>21.752</td>
<td>22.877</td>
<td><strong>17.504</strong></td>
<td>19.952</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>PC 25</strong></td>
<td>12.600</td>
<td>7.000</td>
<td>12.000</td>
<td>12.000</td>
<td><strong>11.360</strong></td>
<td>14.017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Median</strong></td>
<td><strong>18.000</strong></td>
<td><strong>13.786</strong></td>
<td><strong>20.670</strong></td>
<td><strong>20.000</strong></td>
<td><strong>17.142</strong></td>
<td><strong>19.000</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>PC 75</strong></td>
<td>26.000</td>
<td>20.000</td>
<td>29.850</td>
<td>29.700</td>
<td><strong>24.000</strong></td>
<td>24.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Number</strong></td>
<td><strong>139</strong></td>
<td><strong>211</strong></td>
<td><strong>97</strong></td>
<td><strong>305</strong></td>
<td><strong>166</strong></td>
<td><strong>173</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Average time spent on core artistic work = 60% >> average income from these activities = 47%

Performing artists living solely from core artistic work = 10%
Performing artists living solely from work in the arts sector = 27%
(lowest percentages of all disciplines in Flanders)

Performing artists more than other artists consider to quit: 50% considers it from time to time, 9% often
‘Inflation’ of coproductions

Number of coproducers / production - Flemish PA - 1993-2013

Increase in collaborations

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fragmentation of means

More partners =

• more coordination
• risk of thinner engagements

Source: production database performing arts FAI - VTi
Artistic careers and how we perceive them

- How to build a sustainable artistic career in the flex-work context?
- How to support artists careers longer term in the flex-work context?

- Diversification --> careers are non-linear and do not necessarily grow
  - How to think ‘success’ away from the growth model?