

Mobility challenging profiles and roles for artists in the European Agora

Perfiles y roles de los artistas frente al reto de la movilidad en el ágora europea

Cristina Farinha

Institute of Sociology, Faculty of Arts, University of Porto
crisfarinha@yahoo.co.uk

ABSTRACT

Mobility is an emerging paradigm in today's societies which contains many hopes but also resistances. Taking the circulation of contemporary performing artists within the European Union as an illustrative case, this article argues that many obstacles remain that hamper freedom of movement and consequently the development of a common cultural space for interaction and citizenship. Despite growing economic, political and professional aspirations for mobility, specific competences and resources to make effective use of this right-freedom are still lacking. Nevertheless, artists are taking this opportunity and working more and more across borders. These experiences are changing their practices, profiles and even social role, leading to the emergence of communities of interest that go beyond the national sphere and which take Europe as their stage.

Key words: Artists, mobility, access, competences, networks, European cultural space

RESUMEN

La movilidad es un paradigma emergente en las sociedades actuales, el cual encierra esperanzas pero también resistencias. Usando como caso ilustrativo la circulación de artistas interpretativos en la Unión Europea, este artículo argumenta que se mantienen muchos obstáculos para la libertad de movimiento y, consecuentemente, el desarrollo de un espacio cultural común para la interacción y la ciudadanía. A pesar de las crecientes aspiraciones e incentivos económicos, políticos y profesionales a la movilidad, aún se necesitan competencias específicas y recursos para hacer efectivo el uso de este derecho. Sin embargo, el intento de estos artistas para llevar a cabo su trabajo a través de las fronteras es ya una realidad, y sus experiencias están cambiando sus prácticas, perfiles e, incluso, sus roles sociales; ello provoca que emerjan intereses comunes que van más allá del ámbito nacional, ya que toman Europa como escenario.

Palabras clave: Artistas, movilidad, acceso, competencias, redes, espacio cultural europeo

Artists were mobile long before labour markets became global, the European Union (EU) was established and information and communication technologies (ICT) turned into a commodity. These professions are less regulated by national and organizational frameworks, and are thus more flexible and adaptable to different work contexts and partners. Additionally, artists are quantitatively few and generally qualified, and so not usually considered a threat for host societies.

Nowadays, migrations are including extra features and the concept of mobility is overtaking as it expresses better this dynamism: new faces take initiative, movements become circular and temporary, directions get diversified, and purposes overcome traditional economic and political motivations. In the arts too, increasing mobility expectations and practices are changing professional profiles and questioning the role of art in contemporary societies. Mobility in the European agora is seen as a great opportunity for artists, as professionals and citizens, but it also demands resources, imposes barriers and brand-new challenges.

This article intends to discuss mobility as an emerging paradigm in diverse fields of today's complex societies, focusing on the contemporary performing arts sector as an illustrative case. It argues that many obstacles remain to freedom of circulation in Europe, and consequently to the development of a common cultural space for interaction and citizenship. Despite growing economical, political and professional aspirations for mobility, specific competences and resources to help people surf through these troubled flows are still lacking.

MOBILITY IN CONTEMPORARY SOCIETIES: CHANGE AND/OR REPRODUCTION?

As a paradigm to interpret contemporary societies, mobility has been the object of an intense debate within the social sciences. It encloses many hopes and dreams that remain to be empirically proven. Developments in transport and communications along with increasing economic globalization and internationalisation of certain political institutions have diminished distances, allowed for immediacy in the circulation of capitals, goods, persons and ideas as well as made social life more interdependent across frontiers.

Advocates of global cosmopolitanism have long been announcing the rise of a new social era that would emancipate individuals from conditionings imposed by categories such as nation-states, territories, social classes and families. Yet mobility tools and means exist in social, political and economic frameworks, so their different uses and prerequisites for appropriation have also to be considered.

In the last decade, researchers from different disciplines and backgrounds, bringing together the perspectives of sociology, geography, communications and economy, as well as urban and transports studies, have been proposing mobility as a key concept of a newly-emergent paradigm¹. They claim social theory has to consider movement in its analysis of interactions, spaces and communities. So movement –actual, potential or blocked– is rooted in economic, social and political contexts and interactions.

Despite current enlarged opportunities for mobility, different theoretical strands postulate the enduring reproduction of social structures and its inequalities. Elite theories and those based on the concept of social capital² have been de-constructing how mobility is accompanied by a system of constraints, and its accessibility is differentiated and in some cases can even be imposed and limited. For these strands, mobility is taken as a distinctive resource that can lead to new behaviours and opportunities, but which also reflects and reproduces former social and spatial positions. Beyond changes and promises of emancipation, inequalities still seem to be found in contemporary societies.

MOBILITY AS A POTENTIAL

On an institutional perspective, mobility has become essential to access not only goods and services but also social relations, education and work opportunities. In this respect, social theory is rephrasing mobility in terms of equity and social justice. If within the EU territory mobility is recognised as a right-freedom of citizens, then it infers parallel entitlements. The benefit and exercise of the right to move presupposes access to effective material, legal and educational means. Authorities shall therefore be enforced to remove obstacles and provide citizens with suitable conditions.

Consequently, at the individual level, the right to mobility becomes a pre-condition to be able to go forward with personal choices. This concept is frequently associated solely to movement in time and space, yet considering the level of intentions and plans sheds new light on the discussion. Some authors (Allemand et al., 2004; Bonnet & Desjeux, 2000; Kaufmann, 2002 and Montanari, 2002) have developed a concept of mobility that

1. This article mostly considers the contributions from Canzler et al. (2008); Cresswell (2006) and Urry (2007).

2. Social capital refers to the resources resulting from the position of individuals within a certain social network structure. See Bourdieu (1980) for an analysis that takes into account educational and cultural issues.

concentrates on motivations and field of action. Mobility is a potential composed of aspirations and competences, and both are conditioned by personal and professional profiles, qualifications, backgrounds and paths. It is viewed as the way each individual appropriates the field of possible action in this sphere and uses it to develop their projects. So, obstacles to mobility are inherent to individual profiles, besides other institutional barriers. In fact, individual options are also dependent on opportunities and multiple influences emerging from one's social context. In this scenario, mobility emerges as a resource accessible to those already resourceful and in possession of the adequate capitals.

THE (PERFORMING) ARTS AS A LABORATORY

The performing arts, like other artistic disciplines, are characterised by an incredible professional dynamism which is juxtaposed with an enormous vulnerability at the social level.

When referring back to the employability goals of the official EU strategy for growth and jobs, this sector could be considered ideally prepared to face the challenges of current labour markets. It is an open professional field that constantly renovates its borders, roles and hierarchies; it requires highly-motivated workers that are flexible, adaptable, permanent learners and mobile; and it is mostly constituted by freelancers holding multiple jobs and working on a project basis. Even though the sector is also constituted by permanent employees integrated in artistic companies and other institutions, the vast majority are self-employed and in some cases organized in non-profit organizations and/or micro- to small enterprises.

This diversity constitutes the source of the sectors' vitality not only internally, but also in national and international terms. This unique professional framework has led experts to start looking at artistic professions as "laboratories" to study and provide guidelines for labour markets' future developments and trends. The arts sector seems no longer such an atypical professional field, and it is instead setting trends in the world of work and employment. Actually, this field has always been considered a breeding ground for innovation, where the development of new practices and forms of expressions take place.

While this peculiar professional profile is perfectly fit for developing experimental productions where creativity may find a suitable ground, on the other hand, it also personifies a quite vulnerable social condition. Flexibility implies several costs, as it is up to each artist to assume the responsibility of being permanently on the stage despite: irregularity of incomes; high risk of labour accidents; deficient health insurance and

pension coverage; short life span of careers; and complex collective organization and bargaining.

The proclaimed dynamism constitutes simultaneously a risk for artists as workers and in parallel for the sake of diversity and freedom of expression and creation. If nationally, in most countries, artistic professions do not benefit from a specific social status when moving on to the European stage, their social and working condition becomes even more complex and fragile.

Yet even though they are apparently prone to mobility, these professions face, after all, many obstacles when it comes to working in the European market: visas and work permits are quite hard to obtain for those not holding EU citizenship; there is an absence of coordination among Member States and minute integration regarding regulatory issues such as tax, social security and intellectual property rights; languages and cultures are quite different; the recognition of qualifications is troublesome; and there is a lack of transparency and targeted information concerning EU rights and labour markets. The nation-state seems to remain the dominant social and political form of organizing lives and professional projects. Even for artists, the European market remains a complex, expensive and risky option, and it requires longer-term investment.

ASPIRATIONS IN BETWEEN CHANCE AND NEED

Overcoming national markets

Globally as well as across the EU the employment landscape has shifted significantly in recent years, and the profile of the workforce has evolved towards an increasing emphasis on mobility and flexibility and a move towards more intermittent, short-term, project-based ways of working across all sectors. There is a transition from the paradigm of job security to that of flexicurity and career security instead. In this fast-evolving market, geographical and labour mobility is said to improve individual job prospects, and on the other hand allows employers to address existing shortages and skills mismatches in a country or a region.

When thinking about artists we realise that this scenario has always been quite familiar. Still, also in the arts field, expectations have increased and being mobile became an ordinary requirement of any artistic career, a frequent aspiration and/or way out.

Performing artists have always moved in search of better working means and conditions. They escaped their own national markets' limitations regarding infrastructures, social status, audiences, policies and freedom of expression.

At the same time, artistic careers that are a lot freer from institutional constraints have always realised the benefit they could get from travelling and meeting others in terms of inspiration, enlargement of horizons, the exchange of ideas and know-how. Nowadays artists are also moving further and integrating mobility at the very heart of their practices and processes. The single market through ICT is allowing artists not only to present their works abroad but especially to conceive, create and produce them on a cross-border basis. This tendency represents a change. We are not only talking about moving from one country to the other to join a new labour market or exporting finished outputs, but about coming together internationally to do it all jointly from scratch. Beyond a simple search for new inputs, these practices change the rules and very essence of artistic processes, outcomes and role.

In this new world, mobility is more than a mere instrument, it is instead the cement that everything is built upon. With this shift, mobility emerges as the right path for survival or an imposition of the market for these professionals to make their living. As the sector is quite vulnerable at the social level, the wider European market intensifies its fragility. So the current pro-mobility environment might well be convincing professionals to dive into a European scene without a safety net. Besides economic and professional pressures, political aspirations are also making their way up the mobility ladder.

Being driven by politics and subsidies

As a basic pillar of the internal market, the free movement of persons is in parallel also a main political target in the EU project since its foundation. Yet in the last decade, the officially-recognised need to invest in competitiveness as well as in citizenship translated into policy documents such as the Lisbon Agenda, the current Europe 2020 strategy and the Lisbon Treaty, are all increasingly transforming mobility into a key political instrument. These EU strategies were devised to build up a competitive economy based on knowledge. The development of the single market needs workers that are skilled, available and willing to move. The strengthening of the EU as a political union needs citizens that identify and are engaged in the European construction. Promoting and facilitating mobility seems to be the way forward for the EU to achieve the internal market, to come closer to its citizens and develop the sense of what EU citizenship might be about.

These political, economic and artistic targets to promote and facilitate artistic mobility have been reflected in funding policies and tools. Albeit political recognition

and support for art and artists mobility is still minute, in the last decade there has been an increase in the number of funds and grants available for cross-border projects from public to private sources, including governments, foundations, networks and arts centres. Yet, one has to bear in mind that the nurturing of mobility expectations is in reality re-defining the market for arts and culture. This special market, being mostly non-profitable and therefore freer from audiences and consumer constraints, is in fact moulded at the very source of the production line by founders' objectives and options.

The mobility agenda might represent an upgrade for the sector since it seems to recognise it a potential role in contributing to the European integration project in line with the sector of artistic interests. Yet in practice, these developments are not followed by concrete improvements in terms of working conditions that would allow these professionals to safely take this European step and be able to generate this acclaimed and expected creative content and mutual understanding. After all, enhancing working conditions and social status were the main causes for mobility in the first place.

Strategic and communicational competences to live up to the European stage

Precisely in their quest for a better life and better art, artists, against all odds, have been moving and learning by doing. In this way, mobility has been nurturing new forms of creation, production and dissemination of art processes and works. In parallel, it has also been provoking changes in the role of art and artists in contemporary societies.

Creativity and innovation, which before was just associated with artistic sectors, are becoming generalised as attractive competences in diverse professional fields. Simultaneously, work across borders and cultures has amplified –also in the arts sector– the need for competences of a strategic and relational character. Obviously these competences are also important to the development of an artistic career at the national level. However, within the European arena they are essential in order to tackle the plural and multilayered potential benefits but also risks.

Artists and other operators from the performing arts sector working in different countries and/or involved in European projects (even without leaving their home(country) with the help of ICT), are facing the opportunities but also obstacles of this wider market. They are confronted daily with tasks, contexts, expectations, behaviours and partners that question their practices and put into cause the continuity and consistency of their projects as well as their motivation and future career interests. These barriers often result from a lack of diverse qualifications and competences, since technical and artistic skills are not enough to ensure artistic creative processes within international collaborations. Professionals increasingly miss associated strategic and managerial

as well as communicational and relational competences to take full advantage of the European space. In an enlarged geography where costs are high and time is short, these competences become crucial in order to maximise efficient and fruitful interactions and collaborations.

Permanent upgrade of profiles and career projects

Participation in the European market incites professionals to adopt a more dynamic and strategic attitude regarding career development. The European level, which combines and articulates with local and national scales, enlarges dimension and diversity of belongings and scope of action, increasing chances but also pitfalls. Strategic competences rationalise the ways artistic projects and careers are conceived and managed. It is not enough to be a creator or an interpreter, one also has to be a manager, a researcher, a public relations and even a polyglot. Even when these other tasks are taken on by experts, when artists can afford to hire managers, for instance, they still have to know how to negotiate, lead, discuss ideas, objectives and plans with all partners involved.

In this more demanding and competitive market, the need for training, updating and continued participation are doubled. Professionals have got to be on the scene permanently, otherwise they risk losing contracts, schedules, deadlines, contacts and partners. Time management is fundamental, most especially at a time when joint research and reflection are valued but there is a high pressure for producing outputs.

As a consequence, the European market can increase the fragility of those already vulnerable at the national level. Without a safety net, an adequate social status or a certain financial background, risk intensifies and the capacity for manoeuvre and choice are reduced. Economic and political domestic inequalities remain and become more visible in the European common stages.

Art processes and works become temporary collaborative hybrid enterprises

For a sector that is socially fragile and fragmented into micro- and small organizations and self-employed workers it is hard to stay on the European scene and keep up with its fast pace. Frequent involvement in projects and teams of a temporary and circumstantial nature across borders involves extra organizational and communicational demands. Thus it generates needs and dynamics of collective organization and association to ensure (via economies of scale) the division of tasks and means. In this respect the European market is stimulating professionals to meet and share their artistic processes

with partners that at a certain moment are following similar interests and revealing common identities, by engaging in joint creations, co-productions and networking.

From partner searches to project management, ICT are essential work assistants. The internet, notably, is not only a powerful means of information, dissemination and networking, it also constitutes an exciting creative tool that artists across disciplines have been exploring intensively (Staines, 2010). However, digital media can help but not substitute face-to-face meetings. Physical encounters continue to be crucial, and make the difference between those who can (afford to) travel and those who do not have the adequate resources.

In this course of action, physical and virtual mobilities are blurring not only geographical frontiers but also discipline boundaries and hierarchies. While artists and other art professionals are coming together to meet, discuss, create and perform across cultures, disciplines, languages and professional profiles, their interest in hybridism and inter-cultural processes grows, and more attention is given to experimentation and methods. When they are collaborative, processes become as important as final outcomes and products.

Yet, to maximise this sharing and dialogue, relational and cross-cultural competences are required. Professionals need to reinforce their communication skills so to overcome the obstacles provoked by the lack of time, trust and mutual knowledge in non-hierarchical, multilingual and pluridisciplinary temporary teams.

Emergence of communities of interests and practices

Interaction in the European space is stimulating artists that have traditionally been more focused on their own individuality regarding projects and methodologies to associate and collaborate with the rest of the artistic community and beyond. This interest in organizing collectively is a matter of survival in this ever-changing competitive environment. Competence gaps are being diminished by sharing know-how and resources within formal and informal organizations.

Professionals recognise their lack of scale to be able to cope with the vast dimension of the European market, hence their need to network, find partners, reflect together and disseminate targeted information. Many international networks and platforms have taken on this intermediary role. These structures and interdependent connections have represented artists and culture operators, as well as assisting their working processes at grassroots, national and European level. In this sense, they have been feeding and supporting professionals' mobility aspirations and competences and giving the sector a political voice.

Yet, participating in and benefiting from these international networks is dependent on the possession of economic and social capitals. These resources determine and con-

dition actual access to organizations, the ability to pay fees and to travel to participate in events and maintain, over the long term, these connections alive. Again, mobility accentuates economic and geographical inequalities as members from less economically developed countries or those coming from the peripheries of Europe have additional costs to participate in these international circuits. As a result, these organizations reach and represent only a small part of the whole artistic community, while always fighting for their own survival.

Increase of political awareness and engagement

Finally, mobility is also helping to strengthen political awareness in the arts sector. In this process, artists are recognising their belonging and need to face economic and political frameworks. Thus they are “coming out of the closet” and starting to engage in dialogue with other sectors of society and different communities.

Many contemporary creators often get to know different territories and then develop joint projects that are community based and/or social or politically engaged. In the framework of residencies and other mobility schemes they find the right scenario. However these amplified intentions require the articulation of a set of artistic, strategic, communicational and social competences, as well as fine tuning between individual and social interests. These abilities are fundamental to make the most out of shared processes in search of a common expression and vision that can make sense in the interaction with the public.

These artistic aspirations are causing changes in the way art managers and policy-makers envisage art, but they are also themselves a result of policy and funding programmes that have been promoting artistic mobility and cooperation in conjunction with education development, territorial regeneration and social cohesion.

In this mission, the sector's organizations are calling for favourable policies regarding the sector's mobility as well as social status but also in view of recognition for its potential role in the EU integration project. Taking advantage of the tide, the arts field is trying to finally get to see their political and financial support increased and their mobility hindrances reduced. The sector wants recognition for the role they have been playing for a long time already. Therefore, arts organizations and networks are portraying artists as an example of workers' mobility. Yet, beyond personifying the “ideal” EU mobile worker, art works and artists' result of their cross-border collaborations and tours through the European territory are viewed as carriers and portrayers of what EU enthusiasts call the “European experience”. It is claimed that mobility promotes a deeper knowledge of European common culture while contributing to intercultural dialogue and greater respect for cultural diversity (European Commission, 2007).

This actual potential is in practice to be known. Each artist has its own aesthetic and ideological vision and path independently from this political programme, even though these beliefs have supporters within the art sector. Nevertheless, the capacity to question and propose new models to the way identity and citizenship are perceived by simply creating together across borders, getting involved in local communities and finding new ways to communicate with audiences is a more consensual viewpoint, as it does not impose a concrete agenda on the arts.

TOWARDS A EUROPEAN COMMON CULTURAL SPACE

In fact what is at stake is the building up of a shared space for creation, production and dissemination of art works. Yet, the development of this space poses several challenges to the sector and to EU institutions as well as to its Member-States. Otherwise mobility remains, nevertheless, an elite affair, accentuating economic, political and territorial inequalities.

Firstly, this shared cultural space requires the establishing of a European common and coherent policy regarding the management of its different migratory flows. For most arts professionals their linkages and interactions go beyond EU borders and relate to other territories and initiatives worldwide. Yet, artistic mobility in Europe remains unbalanced and unidirectional, especially in relation to third-country nationals. The EU would need to facilitate the circulation of artists and art works across European frontiers by making visa and work permit procedures more flexible, transparent and homogenous.

Then the sector would need to see stronger support for its social condition, capacity building and joint interaction to strengthen its sustainability. This recognition would contribute to the development of careers across Europe, and consequently ensure the diversity of art works and development free from market constraints.

Yet at the moment, as welfare states are withdrawing, markets and societies seem not to be willing to provide the adequate means and protection in return for the desired skills such as mobility and creativity. The EU stage might be the only place left to dare to set up a common regulatory framework that would better serve artists' needs and allow more space for individual choice (that includes the right to stay put).

On the other hand, current market challenges would make it difficult to find a solution at the national level. Furthermore, this step would be transferable to other intellectual

and creative professionals, as nowadays their profiles and working conditions are becoming similar. Actually, the development of a wider community of interests is dependent on an increasing reflection and interaction across all fields of society. Only within this scenario can artistic processes across borders contribute and genuinely aspire to be social and civic enterprises that are the bearers of a message of cultural understanding.

Bibliographical references

- ALLEMAND, Sylvain *et al.* (ed.) *Les Sens du Mouvement*. París, Berlín: Institut pour la Ville en Mouvement, 2004.
- BAUMAN, Zygmunt. *Liquid Modernity*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2000.
- BONNET, Michael y DESJEUX, Dominique (eds.) *Les Territoires de la Mobilité*. París: PUF, 2000.
- BOURDIEU, Pierre. *Le Sens Pratique*. Paris: Minuit, 1980.
- CANZLER, Weert; Kaufmann, Vincent; Kesselring, Sven (eds.) *Tracing Mobilities: towards a cosmopolitan perspective*. Londres: Ashgate, 2008.
- CEDEFOP. *Future Skills in Europe*. Luxemburgo: European Commission Publications Office, 2008.
- CRESSWELL, Tim. *On the Move. Mobility in the Modern Western World*. Londres: Routledge, 2006.
- CVJETIČANIN, Biserka (ed.) *Dynamics of Communication: New Ways and New Actors*. Culturelink Joint Publications Series. No. 10. Zagreb: Institute for International Relations (IMO). 2006
- EUROPEAN COMISION. "European Agenda for Culture in a Globalising World". Bruselas, 2007.
- FARINHA, Cristina. "Why Artists Need (Networks) to Go European?" En: *Give, Get or Get Off - Challenges of Cultural Networking Today*. Bruselas: European Festivals Association, 2008. P.88-93.
- "Os Profissionais das Artes do Espectáculo na Estrada: entre o individualismo e a comunidade de interesses na União Europeia". En: Carmo, Renato y Simões, José (eds.) *A Produção das Mobilidades. Redes, Espacialidades e Trajectos*. Lisboa: Imprensa Ciências Sociais, 2009. P.153-175.
- GLASER, Evelyne *et al.* *Intercultural competence for professional mobility*. Graz: ICOPROMO, European Centre for Modern Languages, Council of Europe, 2007.
- KAUFMANN, Vincent. *Rethinking Mobility*. Hampshire: Ashgate, 2002.
- KLAIĆ, Dragan. *Mobility of Imagination*. Budapest: Central European University, 2007.
- MONTANARI, A. (ed.) *Human Mobility in a Bordless World?* Rome: Società Geografica Italiana, 2002.
- PARENTE, Cristina. *Competências. Formar e gerir pessoas*. Porto: Afrontamento, 2008.
- POLÁČEK, Richard. *Impediments to Mobility in EU Performance Sector and Possible Solutions*. Bruselas: International Network for Contemporary Performing Arts (IETM)/Pearle, 2007.
- STAINES, Judith. "Excited Atoms. An exploration of virtual mobility within the contemporary performing arts". *On-The-Move.org*. (2010). Bruselas: www.on-the-move.org/documents/excited_atoms_final.pdf
- URRY, John. *Mobilities*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2007.