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Creativity under pressure

The effects of de-institutionalization
and marketization on creative labour

CREATIVIDAD BAJO PRESIÓN

LOS EFECTOS DE LA DES-INSTITUCIONALIZACIÓN Y LA MERCANTILIZACIÓN SOBRE EL TRABAJO CREATIVO

RESUMEN

Aunque hay abundantes ejemplos de personas excepcionalmente exitosas que trabajan en las artes, muchos artistas encuentran difícil establecerse y mantenerse en el trabajo creativo. Este artículo analiza la creatividad sostenible a través de la lente del llamado biotopo artístico. Propone que la creatividad sostenible en las artes requiere un equilibrio entre las diferentes esferas del biotopo artístico: el dominio doméstico, el dominio de los *pares*, el dominio civil y el dominio del mercado. Sin embargo, hoy en día los artistas y profesionales creativos experimentan cada vez más presiones del dominio del mercado, ya que su lógica de cuantificación se entromete en las esferas doméstica, educativa y civil del biotopo. De ahí la pregunta central de este documento: ¿cuáles son las consecuencias de una protección institucional decreciente y una creciente mercantilización del biotopo artístico? Se buscan respuestas a través de una encuesta electrónica en la que participaron 1.591 artistas y profesionales creativos de Europa Occidental. Se argumenta que un mercado que impone su lógica a otras esferas -en este caso en el biotopo artístico- consecuentemente comenzará a transformarse. Estas consecuencias se describen en términos de “retroalimentación”: (1) desequilibrio trabajo-vida, (2) isomorfismo y (3) monopolización.

Keywords

Creatividad, trabajo creativo, des-institucionalización, mercantilización, retroalimentación

ABSTRACT

Although there are plentiful examples of exceptionally successful people working in the arts, many artists find it difficult to establish and maintain themselves in creative labour. This paper analyses sustainable creativity through the lens of the so-called artistic biotope. It proposes that sustainable creativity in the arts requires a balance between the different spheres of the artistic biotope: the domestic domain, the peer domain, the civil domain and the market domain. Yet, artists and creative professionals experience increasing pressures from the market domain nowadays, as its quantifying logic intrudes upon the domestic, educational and civil spheres of the biotope. Hence the central question of this paper: what are the consequences of such decreasing institutional protection and increasing marketization of the artistic biotope? Answers are sought via an e-survey in which 1.591 artists and creative professionals in Western Europe participated. It is argued that a market that imposes its logic onto other spheres—in this case in the artistic biotope—will consequently begin to transform itself. These consequences are described in terms of ‘feedback’: (1) work-life-imbalance, (2) isomorphism, and (3) monopolization.

Palabras Clave

Creativity, Creative Labour, de-Institutionalization, Marketization, Feedback

1 INTRODUCTION: SAFEGUARDING SUSTAINABLE CREATIVITY

Although there are plentiful examples of exceptionally successful people working in the arts and creative industries, many (emerging) artists or other creative professionals find it difficult to establish and maintain themselves in creative work (Gielen, 2009; 2010; 2013a, 2013b; Gill & Pratt, 2008; Van Winkel, Gielen & Zwaan, 2012). This raises the question of what it takes to build a career - especially a sustainable one - within these professions. Finding an answer to this question is urgent, since in the present post-Fordist conditions people are constantly challenged in terms of their creative capabilities (Sennett, 2006, 2011; Virno, 2004). The resulting economic and social pressure leads to exhaustion at the micro-level (burnout), meso-level (new forms of bureaucracy), and macro-level (cultural homogenization) and therefore jeopardizes long-term sustainability. Creativity is thus a precious and scarce good. Hence the need to know what the social conditions for sustainable creativity are.

Building on theoretical and empirical research regarding artistic selection processes and careers in the arts (Gielen, 2005; Gielen & Laermans, 2004; Gielen & Volont, 2014; Van Winkel *et al.*, 2012), this paper aims to gain both theoretical and empirical insights into the social conditions for sustainable creativity. In doing so, this research reviews the role of the institutional context in determining the social conditions, as well as the reactions of artists to the increasing pressures on 'the artistic biotope' (cfr. *infra*). This paper, furthermore, builds on the hypothesis that, nowadays, people who want to earn a living in creativity need to find or re-establish a balance between the different domains within the artistic biotope, if they want to do so in a sustainable way. In order to analyse the path toward sustainable careers, this paper will first use insights from previous studies to outline the artistic biotope, highlighting the original role of institutions in providing security to the different spheres of life, the process of deinstitutionalization and its resulting pressure on the artistic biotope. Then, in a second part, using qualitative survey data, reactions to this ensuing imbalance in terms of 'feedback' and resulting paradoxes are shown.

2 THE ARTISTIC BIOTOPE

The question of what it takes for artists and other creative professionals to build and maintain a long-term career in creative labour received roughly the same answers in several consecutive studies (Gielen, 2005; Gielen & Laermans, 2004; Gielen & Volont, 2014; Van Winkel *et al.*, 2012). Four aspects can be distinguished. Artists indicated they needed a space to develop and create their work in a quiet, focused and intimate atmosphere, usually described as 'a studio of my own', 'an atelier', or simply 'a home'. A second necessity mentioned in order to remain creatively active and especially innovative was good discussions with colleagues or experts from the discipline, as can take place in the art academy, artist-in-residencies, team meetings and work, or simply a bar where colleagues who have a similar professional expertise meet to talk about their ideas and their work. A third aspect that was invariably stated, had everything to do with making a living. Artists who want to be able to survive as a professional in the long run, will have to be able to exchange their artistic products for money at some point. The places where this may occur range from galleries, auctions, and art and book fairs to theatres where artists receive part of the revenues, and even to the government, via subsidies. Finally, a fourth requirement was not so much related to money but rather to public recognition. Publicly accessible theatres, museums, biennials and festivals can be used for building a public support base, as well as all kinds of media, such as newspapers, television and Internet blogs. In short, any public or semi-

public space that displays creative work or argues that the work is interesting for some reason, innovative or has social relevance, is regarded as valuable. In order to bring this wide-ranging spectrum of empirical interpretations into analytical focus, four separate domains have been distinguished in which these requirements can be categorized in an ideal-typical manner (see also Gielen, 2009, 2010).

- The *domestic* domain
- The *peer* domain
- The *market* domain
- The *civil* domain

The four domains of the artistic biotope differ in terms of (1) social relations, (2) professional behaviour, (3) use and experience of time and, finally, (4) the appreciation or assignment of values.

Within the *domestic domain*, firstly, artists often prefer to work in isolation and without being disturbed. Visits to the studio are restricted to an inner circle of spouses or partners, relatives and friends, especially when it comes to unannounced visits. Experts, professionals or potential clients are sometimes admitted to the studio upon invitation, but this usually involves ‘cleaning up’ the space and using it in a different manner than when the artists are working there by themselves. When it comes to social relations, intimacy, trust and respect are the keywords. The immediate family often plays an important role, in fact often the partners of the artists decide whether a work will ever leave the studio. In other words, partners and other intimate ‘others’ equally guard the borders between the domestic domain and other spheres. Within the domestic domain, creatives are masters of their own time and can plan their work according to their own preferences and rituals. Moreover, much value is assigned to personal judgement, personal taste, intuition and insight to determine whether an artistic creation actually has any value. Self-reflection and personal experience (individual, or shared with the inner circle) therefore play an important part in assigning value.

Within the *peer domain*, secondly, (aspiring) artists make contact with creative professionals and experts who are knowledgeable about both practical and theoretical aspects of their (future) profession. Obviously, at art academies teachers often fulfil the role of discussion partner and critic, but fellow students can also be important peers. Open studios, workshops or other professional gatherings, hence, make up the peer domain. Although here, as in the domestic domain, social relations can be characterized by respect, the evaluative nature of the exchange prevails. Among professional peers, there is a constant evaluation going on. This relationship is continued in later contacts with programmers, curators, or art critics. Among peers, evaluative interactions come first. Professionals are constantly assessing each other’s qualities and weighing each other’s creative potential. Behaviour is therefore defined, more so than in the domestic domain, by the active exchange of knowledge, by creating and practising skills, whereby one’s own ability, creative potential and talent are continuously measured against already known skills, already realized creations or against the artistic canon. The peer domain is one of trial and error, but also of research and development. Here, recognition or assigning value is no longer based on self-reflection and intuition, as in the domestic domain, but on (historical) knowledge and scientific reflection that are the result of social interaction. Social interaction, furthermore, defines the organization and experience of time in the domain of the peers. The ‘own time’ of the domestic domain is thus exchanged for ‘collectively determined time’ in the peer domain.

Within the *market domain*, thirdly, artistic activity or a creative product is exchanged for money. This equally applies to governments subsidizing the creation of a theatre performance or the organization of an exhibition. Commercial galleries, art fairs, auctions or the box offices of theatres are of course more obvious marketplaces. In these places, social relationships are defined by money changing hands. This is why the art auction is probably the best example of an ideal-typical, pure market: bidders don't need to maintain social relationships with artists or with other professionals and don't have to publicly account for their purchase: only the payment counts. Not only do creative workers have to estimate how much money they can ask for their work or how large a buyout amount should be (see, for example, Velthuis, 2007), they must also learn to estimate production costs and how to work against a deadline. In short, an important aspect of professional behaviour in the market is the ability to express oneself in terms of quantities. This also applies to the organization and experience of time in this domain. Time is converted into units and must be calculated as efficiently as possible. Projects with a clear deadline or delivery date are therefore a suitable method for organizing one's work. In the market one cannot afford to lose track of time in endless reflection or introspection, as in the domestic domain, or by having debates, as in the peer domain. By contrast, in the market, time is strongly rationalized, since time is money. Recognition or assigning value, finally, is expressed in quantitative terms too, such as the price of an artwork, the number of tickets sold, or the height of production costs.

Within the *civil domain*, finally, social relationships are primarily *public relations*. That is, they are visible in a public debate, an interview, a review in a newspaper or in other media. Yet arguments do not always have to be expressed in words. An exhibition in a public museum is also part of a public debate. The word 'exposition' comes from the Latin *expositio*, meaning 'to give an explanation' or 'to make a statement' in public (Bal, 2006). The point is that in the civil domain argumentation and public debate are central. Through argumentation an attempt is made to demonstrate the quality of creative work before a larger public. In arguing the quality, quantity (as in the market) no longer comes first, but rather the artistic and societal *relevance*.

Such an argument may be that the work is artistically innovating or has a particular social value. Social support is therefore not simply measured in numbers of visitors or consumers, like in the market space. Rather, what is at stake is the broader recognition of an artistic idea or a creative product as a cultural value, without the need to go look at the work or buy it. This means that its recognition goes beyond the borders of the peer domain and also transcends monetary value. An artefact only gains cultural value when a number of people use it, for example, to construct their own identity or confirm their social class and culture or subculture (Bourdieu, 1984). Within the civil domain creative expressions can also carry political import, as we know from the national canon. In any case, in this last domain artworks can function as references for a collective or wider culture to define its self-worth and identity (Gielen & Lijster, 2015). Cultural policies and subsidies or cultural and art education are therefore legitimized by this domain. In the civil domain, professional behaviour is no longer exclusively defined by artists who know how to make and defend their work on the basis of specialist know-how, as in the peer domain. Here they also defend the values of the art world or creative discipline they represent to the outside world. In other words, civilly recognized artists assume a public role in which they represent and defend their own support base before a wider, heterogeneous public of politicians, students, journalists and 'the man in the street'. In order to obtain this recognition, a different time span than that in the other three domains is involved. Not one's 'own' time, social time or quantified time, but *social incubation time* defines the organization and experience of time in the civil

domain. It is the time of embedding that is required to gain public support. Civil recognition can take a long time coming and for many artists it simply never arrives.

<p>DOMESTIC</p> <p>Respect relations Ritual behaviour Own time Intuition/self-reflection</p>	<p>PEERS</p> <p>Evaluative relations Praxis Social time Knowledge reflection</p>
<p>Competitive relations Quantifying behaviour Rationalized time Calculated value</p> <p>MARKET</p>	<p>Public relations Representative behaviour Embedded time Public recognition</p> <p>CIVIL</p>

Figure 1. The artistic biotope.

An analysis of creative careers shows that the artistic biotope that is outlined above is often navigated in the same way. Young creatives produce their first try-outs and experiments in the domestic domain. If they are not self-taught, they then go into art education and gradually integrate into the professional peer domain. Sometimes aided by teachers, they may be picked up by a gallery owner (the market) and/or a curator or art critic (the civil domain). Although there is a certain ‘chronologic’ to this ‘biotope trajectory’, almost all artists that were contacted during our research (Gielen, 2005; Gielen & Laermans, 2004; Gielen & Volont, 2014; Van Winkel *et al.*, 2012) emphasized that at some point in their career a balance between the four domains is important. For example, successful artists who have been in the market and or civil domain for too long often express a need to return to the peer or domestic domain. Or, artists who had been publicly and financially successful for a long time, expressed that it ‘exhausted’ them. By this they meant primarily that they got stuck inside their own ideas and had trouble creating truly innovative work. Both in the market and in the civil domain they felt that they were surrounded exclusively by ‘fans’ or by interested collectors, policy makers and curators who only affirmed the artistic quality of the artist without questioning it critically. Dwelling too long in the market or the civil domain thus often generates the well-known phenomenon that artists keep ‘endlessly’ repeating an originally good idea simply because it brings them public acclaim or economic success. Being able to return to the domestic domain, to the ‘own time’ in order to reflect deeply on their work again, or to the environment of peers where they can arrive at new insights through discussions with experts is always deemed necessary, at a certain point in their career, to further develop and deepen their own artistic or creative oeuvre. Reversely, those who keep ‘hanging on’ in the domestic domain will never become professional artists. Art then becomes a hobby or creative therapy, but no creative person can make a living from their artistic work when they remain in the comfort zone of the domestic domain. And also, those who only

dwell in the domain of peers run the risk of remaining stuck in endless debates and experiments without ever arriving at an artistic outcome or product. In short, artists who wish to develop their own work in the long run and also wish to make a living from art will continually have to perform a *balancing act* between the four domains of the biotope outlined above.

3 INSTITUTIONAL SECURITY AND MARKETIZATION

As stated before, the diagram of the artistic biotope is an ideal-typical construct that was developed by research concerning selection processes and careers in the arts (Gielen, 2005; Gielen & Laermans, 2004; Gielen & Volont, 2014; Van Winkel *et al.*, 2012). However, before highlighting our empirical findings in terms of ‘feedback’ (cfr. *infra*), we will first look at the artistic biotope in light of macro-sociological and socio-historical theory. In the following paragraphs, we will refer to sociological work that we consider relevant, in order to explain the meso- and macro-level transformations the artistic biotope has undergone (see Adams, 1971; Bott, 1957; Gielen, 2013; Gielen & De Bruyne, 2009; Heusden & Gielen, 2015; Nowotny, 2011; Sennett, 2006, 2011; Weeda, 1995). The transformation of the artistic biotope’s institutional security will be described in terms of (1) *defamiliarization* (in the domestic domain), (2) *competition & formatting* (in the peer domain), and (3) *cultural industrialization* (in the civil domain).

Regarding the *domestic* domain, firstly, we may infer that the classical, protective institution consists of the nuclear family (Adams, 1971; Bott, 1957; Weeda, 1995). Our research (Gielen, 2010; Gielen & Laermans, 2004; Gielen & Volont, 2014) has shown how the family structure is crucial during the first professional years of creative individuals. Older artists readily admit that during the first five or ten years of their career they were sustained by the income of their partners and received their mental support during the developmental phases of their creative labour. In short, in the domestic domain both ‘own time’ and intimacy are institutionally protected by the family. Yet, it is known that the traditional family structure started to erode substantially since the 1970s. A changing labour market, which not only welcomed more women but also placed higher demands on mobility and flexibility (see, for example, Sennett, 2006, 2011; Zaretsky, 1977) started to take its toll on the private sphere and on family life. Especially creative labour - which often means precarious project-based work and increasingly expects international mobility in a globalizing cultural industry - is hard to combine with traditional family life (Gielen, 2009, 2013b). This contributes to the decline of the institutional protection of the domestic domain which we label as *defamiliarization*.

Regarding the *peer* domain, secondly, we argue that reflection, praxis, social time and evaluation with other creatives is protected by the institutions of (art) academies and universities (Gielen, 2010; Gielen, 2013a, 2013b). These institutions, however, pressurized by international competition, have grown in scale over the past ten years. They have merged with other educational programmes and have strongly rationalized educational space and time through measures such as strict contact hours and competencies (see, for example, Biesta, 2013; Gielen, 2013a, 2013b; Van Heusden & Gielen, 2015). In other words: *increasing* efficiency in art education seems to generate *decreasing* ‘social time’, debate and trial and error. Our research (Gielen, 2010; Gielen & Laermans, 2004) showed how contact hours, competencies, the duration of studies and all the concomitant monitoring in the form of accreditations and audits alter the relationship between student and teacher, and interfere with the social time for debate and knowledge exchange (see also Biesta, 2013). Moreover, the competition between

teachers and students and among the students themselves is being fuelled by contests and teamwork (see, for example, Sennett, 2011) as well as by agencies within educational institutes that are aimed at ‘marketing’ the students before they graduate. We label, hence, the decreasing protection from the peer domain’s institutions as *competition and formatting*.

Regarding the *civil* domain, thirdly, a similar analysis can be made for the institutions of museums, theatres and art critique. The continuing global economic crisis is causing subsidies and political support for such institutions to cave in, and a globalized cultural industry increasingly forces creative cities and organizations to compete against each other (Gielen, 2010; 2013; Nowotny, 2011). As a result, institutions no longer protect, or less so, the ‘incubation time’ for the social integration of creative labour. Furthermore, fewer art reviews in the mainstream media also means that artists have fewer public platforms, making it increasingly difficult for them to realize their public role (see, for example, Lijster *et al.*, 2015). Quantification in the civil domain is found, for example, in the increasing importance placed on visitor numbers and the decreasing subsidies by governments. This encourages museums and theatres to orientate themselves on art tourism and to brand themselves as seminal actors within the cultural industries (Gielen, 2010). We label the decreasing protection from the civil domain’s institutions as *cultural industrialization*.

As such, it seems that the current tendencies reinforce only one institution, namely that of the market. The analyses outlined above, hence, suggests that the quantifying logic of the market domain increasingly intrudes into the other domains of the artistic biotope. Because the borders of the domestic, peer and civil domains are less institutionally protected, the logic of the market intrudes in these domains more than before. As a result, an important quality of the market, i.e. the ability to quantify one’s own creative labour and results, is now being integrated in the other domains, via (1) *defamiliarization*, (2) *competition and formatting*, and (3) *cultural industrialization*. Figure 2 illustrates how this expansion of the market sphere installs hybrid zones in which the values and logics of various domains start to intermingle.

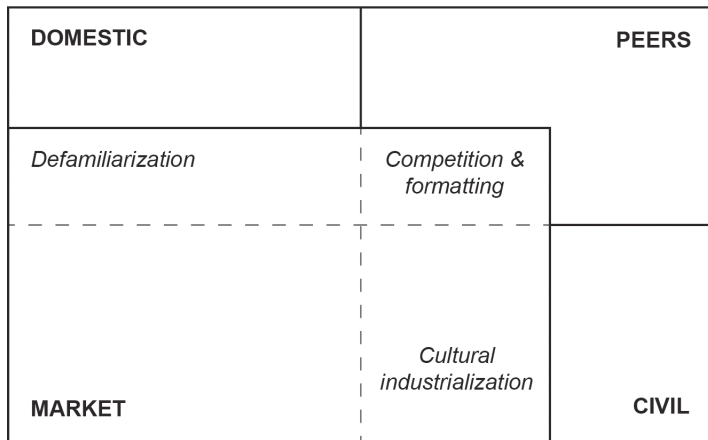


Figure 2. Marketization in the artistic biotope.

As a result of this process of diminishing institutional protection of the domestic, peer and civil domains on the one hand, and the intruding force coming from the market domain on the other, it appears that the position and function of each of the spheres in the artistic biotope are in jeopardy. Therefore, finding the balance between these four domains—which is proposed here

to be of vital importance for artists and creative professionals to achieve long-term creative sustainability—is increasingly challenging. Therefore, questions of how artists and creative professionals experience the current situation of the artistic biotope, and what are suitable responses to deal with the possible imbalance between the domains have emerged.

4 METHODS

In order to empirically investigate the current (im)balance in the artistic biotope as experienced in the field, a survey was developed and sent out to artists and creative professionals in Western Europe. In total, 1,591 responses were collected, with the majority of the respondents originating from Belgium, the Netherlands and Spain. The respondents indicated to work in a variety of creative disciplines, with performing arts (37%), visual and graphic arts (33%), audio-visual arts (28%), music and signing (21%), and arts education (19%) as the most reported ones (multiple answers were possible). For this study, a qualitative content analysis was performed on the open questions of the survey. The main question analysed was: *“Are there certain issues that undermine the creative professional’s creativity?”*, while additional information also was obtained from an analysis of the questions *“A sustainable creative career’ means to me...”*, and *“Could you think of any possible solutions for creative professionals when it comes to the enforcement of their creativity?”*. Two independent coders content-analysed the main qualitative input, using the following procedures.

In a first step, both coders individually created provisional categories and first-order codes. Following the procedures suggested by Miles & Huberman (1994), the first categorical codes provided descriptive labels for the factors involved in enhancing or undermining a sustainable artistic career. After completing the first step, both coders together categorized the open codes through axial coding in second-order codes (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). Through this process of data reduction, a total of nine sensitizing concepts were jointly identified: (sectoral) image, government subsidies, commerce, administration/bureaucracy, underpaid work and precarity, legal status, experimentation, isomorphism, and skewed power distributions. Both coders then independently re-coded their first-order codes into the emerged nine themes, thereby building a set of more abstract, theory-rich constructs. The researchers allowed for new concepts that were not previously identified to emerge in this second round of coding, however no new themes were identified. The subsequent second-order coding results were assessed on interrater reliability using Krippendorff’s alpha, which controls for chance coincidences (Hayes & Krippendorff, 2007). The alpha coefficient was 0.96, which is above Krippendorff’s most conservative threshold for reliability. Discrepancies were resolved through discussion. The final step concerned an examination of how the content of the emerging themes was related to the theoretically derived relationship between the artistic biotope and its diminishing institutional security.

5 ‘FEEDBACK’ ON THE MARKET DOMAIN: A TRIPLE PARADOX

As has been outlined above, protective institutions such as the nuclear family, the art school and the museum increasingly lose their regulative role in the domestic domain, the peer’s domain and the civil domain, respectively. Simultaneously, the quantifying logic of the market domain increasingly regulates the social relations, professional behaviour, use of time and assignment of value in the other spheres of the artistic biotope. Based on our qualitative data, one could

conclude that the market domain reinforces, whereas the other domains deinstitutionalize. We, however, argue that a market that imposes its logic onto other spheres— in our case, the artistic biotope—consequently begins to transform itself. We identify the process of a self-transforming market in terms of ‘feedback’. Each domain of the artistic biotope displays a specific form of feedback on the market, namely: (1) *work-life-imbalance* (resulting from the domestic domain), (2) *isomorphism* (resulting from the peer domain) and (3) *monopolization*.

DOMESTIC TO MARKET: IMBALANCE OF WORK QUALITY AND LIFE QUALITY

Regarding the domestic domain, feedback on the market is generated by the urge of the creative professional to support his or her family by all means necessary. After all, the traditional family structure functions as a support mechanism during those first, crucial years of a creative career (Adams, 1971; Bott, 1957; Weeda, 1995). Partners and other family members regularly function as carriers of faith, trust and private evaluation for the artistic experimentation phases of the artist. We noted, however, that respondents experience an ambivalent relation with their families: on the one hand the respondents perform creative labour in order to sustain their family, on the other hand respondents experience financial difficulties to succeed. An autonomous performing artist, age 38, states:

If I were to have a sustainable career, it would mean to me that I would be able to support my life with the work related to the artistic discipline I have dedicated my life to, without compromising the wellbeing of my family and myself, their economic future and my own.

Another performing artist, self-employed and 45 years old, likewise indicates the inherent tension between precarity related to creative labour on the one hand, and family ties on the other:

I work project-based, and I never know what the next year will bring. At the same time, at my age of 45, I haven't gathered any pension funds. Yet I am the breadwinner of a family.

Safeguarding family ties is a general phenomenon, equally applicable to workers outside the realm of creative labour. Transposing the phenomenon to the functioning of the artistic biotope, however, we noted that in order to safeguard the family, the artist may opt for assignments that are creatively and qualitatively less rewarding. A musician, age 30, reflects on the relationship between decreasing creativity and increasing income:

I experience an imbalance between creative work and my family, as well as between the time I put into my work and the rewards I get for it. The most creative projects demand the most of my time, but I don't have any guarantees whether there will be any results. Because of material reasons, I often choose for less inspiring and less creative projects, but with guaranteed income.

We noted earlier that the domestic domain is the sphere where the creative professional is master of his or her ‘own time’, where he or she plans, creates and works according to personal preferences. Yet, we found that working for income rather than for creativity - in order to provide for one's family - seems to result in decreasing quality regarding the creative labour

performed in the studio, home, or other domestic spheres. This performing artist and teacher, age 41, reflects upon the intrusion of market values into his domestic domain, resulting in *decreasing quality* of his work and creativity:

As a creator with a complex family reality I'm absolutely pushed into margins, partly because the resources time I have are far less than for someone who is free of those responsibilities. In the current reality, to be able to work independently means absolute nomadic life with no place to call home and you can forget a pension or any other possible support you might need in future, like in case of disability.

One might expect that installing free competition will generate a functioning market, filled with adequate prices, jobs and products. Whereas this may be true for state-regulated markets or free markets outside the realm of creative labour, we found the opposite effect in the functioning of the artistic biotope's market. For example, a teacher in the discipline of dance, 32 years old, explains:

Because of my family, I try to create a balance between paid and non-paid assignments. But as a broader consequence of this, there is an imbalance between the supply and the demand in the sector.

The overall finding concerning the feedback from the domestic to the market sphere is that, in order to provide for their families, creative labourers become creative in the *search* for assignments, rather than in their creative work *itself*. Hence, the market wherein creative goods and jobs are exchanged generates a negative feedback on itself. Other everyday instances of feedback from the domestic domain onto the market could be found in, for example, illegal downloads and piracy. These are frequently occurring practices amongst the creatives we interviewed. From their presumably safe place in the domestic domain the respondents are frequently navigating the fine line between creativity and petty crime in order to expand their creative horizon. After all, such practices are known to be dysfunctional to the traditional functioning of the market.

PEERS TO MARKET: ISOMORPHISM

Regarding the domain of the peers, we indicated how market values are manifested in terms of individual and educational competition. We found, however, that the tendency to quantify and formalize individual and organizational creation in turn stimulates the increased similarity of cultural output, as was hinted at by our respondents. Following DiMaggio & Powell (1983, 1991), we identify the feedback from the domain of the peers on the market domain as *isomorphism*.

DiMaggio & Powell (1983, p. 147) argued that competitive markets generate a paradox: rational actors on the micro-level (in our case, creative professionals) as well as on the meso- level (in our case, cultural organizations and institutions) will behave in increasingly *similar* ways as they try to *change* their ways of organizing. This process is labelled *isomorphism* and includes three instances: *coercive* isomorphism, stemming from external rules; *mimetic* isomorphism, resulting from imitating the primordial actor in the sector as a response to uncertainty; and *normative* isomorphism, which is associated with imitating behaviour due to norms in the surrounding sector/resulting from the public.

Normative isomorphism, firstly, is related to professionalizing and imitating behaviour that is based on norms and beliefs held in the environment of the organization or individual under scrutiny (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983, p. 150). We found instances of isomorphism that are related to the profession, rather than to the output of an individual or organization. Classical conceptions of (normative) isomorphism argue that the output products would be produced in increasingly similar ways due to norms and beliefs in a specific sector. Our respondents, however, suggested that the quality of their profession, rather than the product they make, tends to isomorphism. The belief they offered is that in order to build a sustainable career in creative labour, everyone has to act and behave as an *entrepreneur* in similar ways, which in turn has an effect on the desired resource of creativity. This theatre maker notes:

I am a theatre maker but I feel that I must also act as a cultural entrepreneur. I have so many entrepreneurial issues on my mind for which I am not educated. It takes a lot of time and energy, and it goes at the expense of my creative ideas.

This seems to generate an inherent tension between the notion of the *artist* on the one hand, and the notion of the *professional* on the other, or: the institutionalization of the artistic *career* that became predominant since the European 'culture boom' (Gielen, 2009). Using Van Gogh as a preliminary example, Heinich (1991) showed how breaking institutionalized rules, for example those of the academy, became the norm for modern artists. By the end of the 1940s, the artistic career became institutionalized, and so did the artist: the artist became the 'professional' (Gielen, 2015). However, whereas one would expect that the 'turn to entrepreneurialism' would generate unique and diverse careers in the arts market, it was found that the demanded turn to professionalism may *inflate rather than generate creativity*. A self-employed professional in music production explains:

Expectations are high, not only inside but also outside the creative terrain. Especially today, when everybody in the field has to become a freelancer and an entrepreneur. So, I am a creative professional... but this undermines my creativity.

Mimetic isomorphism, secondly, was exclusively found on the individual level. Yet, whereas normative isomorphism was found to be related to professional behaviour ('the entrepreneur'), mimetic isomorphism was found to be related to the *output of* professional behaviour. As said before, building a career in the creative sector is nowadays increasingly uncertain as the classical institutions lose their regulative and protecting role within the artistic biotope. Creative professionals experience difficulties in providing financially for their families in the domestic domain, experience increasing competition in the educational space of the peer domain, and are confronted with the quantifying logic of the 'cultural industries' in the civil domain. As a response to this institutional uncertainty, creative professionals may opt to re-direct their creative output towards the work of their peers or towards the preferences of the public. An artist in applied arts issues such isomorphism towards the taste of the consumer:

My sector is not lucrative and is therefore dependent on financial support. My work is heavily influenced by this. You experience lower levels of creativity, and you shape your work towards the norms of what people want to see. Or at least, what you think that people want to see. And I guess that's what everybody wants: accessible entertainment.

The following quote from a musician reflects a rather negative stance on cultural output that is created towards the preferences of the public. He describes how market values in his sector lead to organizational competition, to uncertainty, to creation *for* the public, and finally to a lessened degree of creativity. He points specifically at the inherent interplay of competing organizations on the one hand, and the taste of the public on the other:

It is problematic that everything has to do with money. There are certain organizations that consider everything in terms of money. If they are uncertain about whether your work will be financially profitable, you're done. This leaves very little room for artists, because they will in turn create things towards 'the expectations of...'. What does this have to do with true creativity?

Coercive isomorphism, finally, stems from formal and external rules and regulations. More specifically, coercive isomorphism, argue DiMaggio & Powell (1983, p. 150), results from 'formal pressures exerted on organizations by other organizations upon which they are dependent, and by cultural expectations in the society within which organizations function'. Following DiMaggio & Powell, we retain two elements from this definition: formal pressures and cultural expectations. Going beyond DiMaggio & Powell, we translate these elements to the influence of organizations on individuals.

Among the creative professionals we surveyed, we found pressures exerted on them by the formatted logic of, for example, subsidy funds. It is known that artists and creative professionals increasingly work in multiple artistic disciplines, for example when combining visual arts and graphic design, or music composition and music teaching. Yet, the formatted logic of subsidy funds seems not adapted to the diverse qualities under which creative professionals apply for grants. Among the discourse of our respondents, we discovered one specific form of isomorphism, which we label as *formal* isomorphism. Formal isomorphism is related to the situation wherein creative professionals who combine diverging qualities are grouped together 'on paper', by which the subsidy document fails to encompass the diverse ways of working of the applicant. A creative worker who combines stage design and curating explains:

The policy funds are not oriented to questioning the new ways of working or researching, at least not in the performing arts scene. Yet there is a whole generation that does not fit in any proposed discipline and therefore cannot apply correctly for their interdisciplinary work.

Formal isomorphism, or, the 'search for isomorphism on paper' is also confirmed by this performing artist:

Art, by definition, is something uncatchable, and as a paradox in order to realize something uncatchable, as an artist you first have to catch it in words in order to receive funding. Moreover, it is very rare that a funding body takes the time to look at what they have funded. Instead they prefer survey-based hard data, like, how many people attended? And so on. This turns the piece into a commodity rather than an experience.

The second element of coercive isomorphism is related to 'cultural expectations in society' (cfr. supra). These expectations too generate increased similarity regarding the output – the creative products – issued by organizations that are active in the field of creative labour. Before we

quote a visual artist at length, we draw attention to the fine line between mimetic and coercive isomorphism. Whereas mimetic isomorphism is a reaction to expectations in the surrounding sector, coercive isomorphism is a reaction to expectations 'from below', or, societal and public taste in general:

I think the current tendencies in supply and consumption of cultural goods tend to mirror the surplus economy of capitalist society. My suggestion would be not to further increase what we offer in the sense of cultural events and programmes, but rather to reduce and intensify/diversify this offer. Less, but better conceived and developed projects, with more diversity and with more time for their implementation. Artistic projects are precious, they should be appreciated and not presented as overkill for a potential audience.

We argue that isomorphism, as a feedback mechanism from the peer domain on the market domain, is a paradoxical consequence. A free and competitive market could be considered as a precondition for innovation, quality, and diverse output. Yet, the predominant marketization and competition among organizations of creative labour was found to inhibit innovation and diversity regarding such output. This writer/singer states:

There should be more theatres that dare to program new names. Theatre programmers act way too safe, and as a consequence there is not much room left for any innovation in their programming.

CIVIL TO MARKET: MONOPOLIZATION

The predominance, finally, of market values in the civil domain equally produces a feedback effect on the market itself via 'cultural industrialization' (cfr. supra). Adequate examples are 'the majors' in pop music, or widely known museums that play their role in the tourism industry of 'creative cities'. This often leads to decreased artistic chances for creative workers 'at the bottom of the pyramid' who, by incident or by choice, are not related to the larger players and institutions of the cultural industry: "the creative industries, what they do is speculate with and exploit artists!" (performing artist), or, "the creative industries are defining creativity as a one-sided sector, leading to a hierarchic and competitive mechanism" (audio-visual artist), or, "artists are constantly kept under control by the large institutes who keep asking more quality for less money" (graphic designer). We identify the following feedback effect as *monopolization*.

The feedback effect of monopolization was found on the individual level as well as on the organizational level. The following quote by an architect and designer, however, indicates the existing link between both levels, as artists working within the larger and more visible institutions seem to enjoy a privileged position in the market, whereas those working with 'the minors' seem *a priori* disadvantaged:

The largest amount of money always goes to those artists who are on the payroll of museums, cultural centres, galleries, ... Yet the artists who only exhibit there, get peanuts. Then people start to think we are lazy and that we have no appreciation from society at all.

Monopolization on the individual level was labelled by our respondents as ‘the star system’. Yet here again, we detect the interplay between *individual* creative professionals and the *organizations* they work with. Individual and organizational monopolization, so it seems, go hand in hand. Below, an audio-visual artist discusses how certain institutions generate a system of personal acclaim, resulting in lower quality output in the market:

I see nepotism, relations, blind professionals... who are all affecting the quality of the work. I’m speaking about programming, curating and inviting. But the work should be the thing to exhibit, not the person. The star-system should disappear in order to generate a culture of understanding and analysing.

Monopolization on the organizational level shows how cultural institutions ‘on top’ of the hierarchy have an effect on the production and consumption of creativity ‘at the bottom’. Monopolies of large institutions, such as ‘the big theatres’ in the quote underneath, will always play a role in the market domain. The question is, however, in what way creative workers will respond. This performing artist chose to make compromises and to accept the monopoly:

As an artist, it seems that you cannot do without compromises. The big theatres only want to sell commercial productions. Yet you can’t cut off the bottom of the pyramid and only keep the top.

Monopolies, on the other hand, may also have adverse effects on the resource of creativity. Among several of the answers of our respondents, we found that large institutions who likewise enjoy symbolic value in their field, very often tend to demand free or low-paid creative labour from their collaborators. This, in turn, can lead to a feedback effect whereby creative workers will work below the price or whereby those who still choose to ask the ‘right’ price miss out on artistic opportunities. A performing artist explains:

I see a very egoistic stance of the large, subsidized institutions, and an ignorant stance of the policy makers. They always try to generate more growth, but we can’t always work for free. Very often they base their decision on the symbolic value of the names they book, but they don’t look beyond that, to other talented artists.

The figure below outlines the institutional relationships between the various domains. It illustrates how traditional institutions are having trouble protecting their institutional borders, resulting in changes among the relationships, professional attitudes, and experiences of time and recognition within each domain. Hybrid and heterogeneous zones arise in which the logics of different domains intermingle. This shift and hybridization does not alter the fact that individually, the analysed creative workers and artists still distinguish between the various domains at the micro-level. Furthermore, they deem a balance between the domains necessary if they are to survive artistically in the long run. Our additional argument, hence, is that imbalance in the artistic biotope generates paradoxical feedback effects on the market domain itself. Free and competitive markets, whether they are installed in the peer domain via the rationalization of arts education, or whether they are installed in the civil domain via the ruling institutions of the cultural industries, do not always, as one would expect, lead to a higher degree of quality, innovation and diversification.

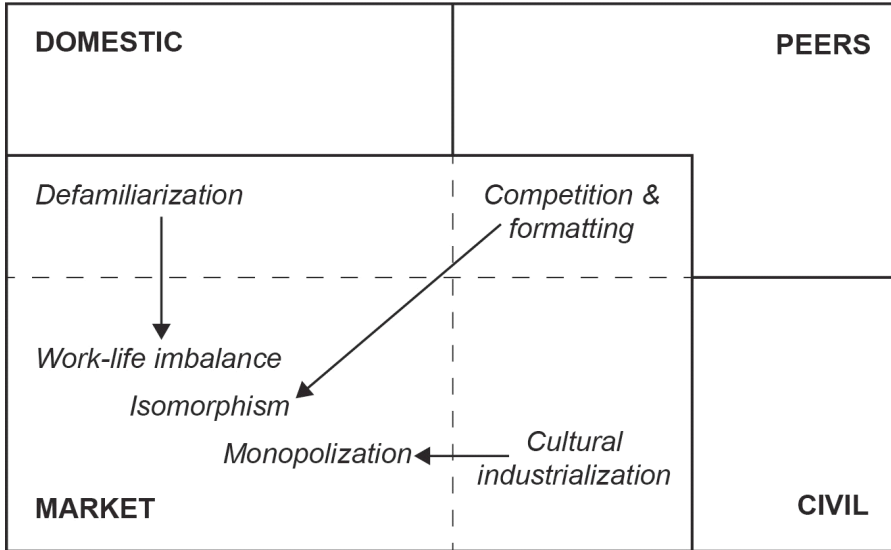


Figure 3. Feedback in the artistic biotope.

7 CONCLUSION: CREATIVITY UNDER PRESSURE

We have looked at how artists and other creative professionals function nowadays by using the theoretically and empirically founded model of the artistic biotope. We came to conclude that institutional protection of the domestic, the peer, and civil domain is declining, while a competitive market logic is on the rise. This results in hybrid areas in which domestic, peer, and/or civil logics become mixed with market logics. The creative individuals we interviewed reported that they experienced growing pressure from the market. Although it is generally assumed that heightened competition and a free market stimulate creativity and innovation, artists and other creatives are experiencing quite the opposite. Work-life imbalance, isomorphism, and monopolization are recognized 'feedback' effects that seem to only suppress creativity. Further studies will have to show whether and how this imbalance may be addressed.

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