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CLESO

CONTEMPORARY DANCE ARTISTS IN BRUSSELS

A DESCRIPTIVE REPORT ON THEIR SOCIO-ECONOMIC POSITION



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This report is released in the frame of the FWO-funded research project *'Choreographies of Precariousness. A Transdisciplinary Study of the Working and Living Conditions in the Contemporary Dance Scenes of Brussels and Berlin'* supervised by Prof. Dr. Katharina Pewny and Prof. Dr. Christel Stalpaert (Ghent University) and Prof. Dr. Rudi Laermans (KU Leuven).

Introduction

This interim report was written within the context of *Choreographies of Precariousness: A Transdisciplinary Study of the Working and Living Conditions in the Contemporary Dance Scenes of Brussels and Berlin*, a four-year study funded by FWO (Fonds voor Wetenschappelijk Onderzoek – Vlaanderen / Fund for Scientific Research – Flanders)¹. The transdisciplinary orientation of this project will offer facts and figures on the working and living conditions of contemporary dance artists based in Brussels or Berlin (through quantitative research) as well as a deeper insight in their motivations, choices and values (through qualitative research). Moreover, since the working conditions and aesthetics within dance cannot be neatly separated from each other, the study will allow an in-depth analysis of their interaction. The quantitative investigation of the working and living conditions of Brussels- and Berlin-based dance artists rests on a theoretical framework that was constructed through the study of existing theories on flexible work and the so-called *precariat*. In the subsequent qualitative part, the focus of the project will shift to dance artists' motivations and values as well as their choices pertaining to possible career paths or professional trajectories, working processes and aesthetics.

The quantitative data collected in Brussels and Berlin respectively will facilitate the well thought-out selection of a limited number of dance artists with different profiles in each city. Since we hypothesize that *precarity* dominates the profession and vastly influences both the actual lives of contemporary dance artists and their modes of working, the professional practices of the selected respondents will be observed and documented in detail. However, this is for the moment still a future prospect. As for now, this report gives a descriptive outline of the Brussels contemporary dance scene² based on facts and figures stemming from an online survey conducted between 15 April and 31 August 2015 and resulting in 94 completed and valid questionnaires. *Annex 1* offers more information on the consulted background literature and, particularly, the overall research design. Most of the figures we refer to hereafter can be found in *Annex 2*; for the list of bibliographical references, see *Annex 5*.

1. Demographics

In general, the contemporary dance population in Brussels is a well-educated group. *Figure A* shows that 81% of the respondents completed a professional or academic Bachelor, received a Master's degree or obtained a certificate from a private school for

¹ Annelies Van Assche (Ghent University) is the principal researcher and will use the research results as input for a joint PhD in Theatre Studies (Ghent University) and Social Sciences (KU Leuven). Theatre scholars Katharina Pewny and Christel Stalpaert (S:PAM/Studies in Performing Arts and Media, Ghent University) together with sociologist Rudi Laermans (CeSO/Centre for Sociological Research, KU Leuven / University of Leuven) act as principal supervisors; Pascal Gielen (University of Groningen and Antwerp University) and Gabriele Brandstetter (Free University of Berlin) assume the position of co-advisor within the project. For the initial quantitative part, Simon Leenknecht and Wim Christiaens provided important assistance for the statistical analysis.

² The data provide relevant information on the Brussels dance scene seen through a Flemish lens. Unfortunately, the methodology and consulted database did not allow a profound consideration of the dance artists who mainly rely on support from the Walloon region or French-speaking community.

higher education. During their studies, the majority of the queried dance artists focused on the arts, mostly the performing arts (along with economics, engineering, humanities, social sciences and law among the remaining non-artistic foci). Most respondents are female³, with a higher percentage of female respondents indicating that their educational level is high. Up to 86% of all female respondents belong to the highly educated group, compared to 71% of all male respondents. The relationship between gender and education is statistically significant, though this must of course be put into perspective since we cannot assess the actual representativeness of the 94 queried Brussels-based contemporary dance artists making up our population.

Particularly within the context of Brussels, it makes sense to ask contemporary dance artists whether they have studied at P.A.R.T.S., the contemporary dance school founded by Anne Teresa De Keersmaeker. Since 1995 the school has generated a network of ex-students and teachers in Brussels, which facilitates one's inclusion in the contemporary dance scene (and this notwithstanding the diminished importance of a diploma testifying of specific competences or qualifications within contemporary art worlds). According to *Figure B*, almost half (45,7%) of all our respondents have studied at P.A.R.T.S. Overall, after having finished their education, contemporary dance artists do not experience that much difficulty in finding work⁴. Indeed, *Figure C* shows that approximately only 1 in 10 of the respondents needed more than a year to find a job. More than half of all of them started working within the first three months after graduating, of which half could enter a job already during their education or immediately after graduation.

Due to the high level of physicality and the dependence on the body, the dance profession is a relatively young one. Also, dancers and performers are often obliged to retire at a relatively early age because of injuries. It is therefore not surprising that dancers or performers tend to be of a younger age than those choreographing, teaching or directing rehearsals. The latter occupations indeed allow dance artists to practice their profession at an older age. The numbers in *Figure D* show that the majority of the respondents are younger than 40. The average age lies between 34 and 35 years old. The oldest respondent is 53 years old; the age cohorts of 26 – 30 years and 31 – 35 years each make up about a quarter of our population, implying that more than half of them are between 26 and 35 years old.

Almost all respondents indicate that their principal occupation is performer, but only 26% mark 'performer' as their only main occupation. Indeed, 71% of the self-defined performers have several main occupations. *Figure E* shows that the majority of those only performing are between 26 and 40 years old. Among very young respondents

³ We note that data from *Kunstenpunt* since 2012 on persons connected to the labels 'dance', 'dancer' or 'dance and creation' and working with Flemish subsidies/a Brussels co-producer reveal a slight oversupply of male dancers (55% respectively). This requires further exploration. See further: <http://data.kunsten.be/articles/vrouw-manverhoudingenin-het-vlaams-podiumkunstenlandschap-fe#l-27>

⁴ The performing arts sector in Belgium knows its own modalities of work. It is therefore necessary to point out the specificity of the sector, in which most workers are busy making and creating performances or are asked to participate in a project. 'Finding work' in this sense has less to do with searching and applying for jobs, but rather with looking for funding and residencies on the one hand and entertaining a broad professional network and the corresponding possibilities for collaboration on a project basis on the other.

(between 21 and 25) and older ones (over 40), the general tendency to have other main occupations next to performing is very outspoken. Actually, few respondents are only choreographers, teachers or rehearsal directors and their ages vary.

Figure F synthesizes the years of work experience among the respondents, which vary from one year to 32 years. The average number of working years lies between 11 and 12 years; most of the queried Brussels dance artists (nearly 30%) have between one and five years of working experience. It must be noted that almost three-quarters of them have been working between one and 15 years, which confirms the predominance of relatively young artists within our sample.

When comparing the age categories with employment in a dance company or collective⁵, we note that the proportions shift according to employment in one or several companies as compared to none. According to *Figure G*, two-thirds of all respondents were at the moment of the survey employed in at least one company. Among those not employed in a company proportionally more dance artists are younger; among those working for one company, we find notably less dance artists who are very young and relatively elder professionals. Like this group, also the third group of those employed in several companies has an age weight of dance artists between 31 and 40 years old. Of the respondents who were on the contrary not employed in a company at the moment of the survey, 42% have between one and five years of work experience, while those employed in one or more companies tend to have more work experience. This is not really surprising and supports the idea that besides physical capital, so-called professional capital or one's esteem within the professional community, social capital or network contacts, and learning-by-doing are of great importance in order to construct a solid career path (Hesters 2004:95). It should also be noted that the group of respondents employed in one or more companies includes the only few respondents with more than 30 years of experience.

Figure H demonstrates that the majority of the queried dance artists have a single marital status. Almost half of them indicate that they are single, whereas the other half are married or officially living together with a partner (non-marital cohabitation). One-quarter of the respondents live alone, while the majority live together with their partner. Relatively few respondents share a home with roommates. A quarter have at least one child, with a maximum of three children. The predominance of young artists in the profession may help to explain the rather low percentage of respondents with children.⁶ When asked for the main three reasons for not having children, the top choices are 'not now' and 'single'. However, various respondents mark their 'low income' and the 'insecurity of their income' as a top three reason for not having children (without it

⁵ The respondents were asked if they were currently part of a company or collective. Companies and collectives that are mentioned among others are: Rosas, Damaged Goods, ZOO, Caravan Productions, Hiatus, CABRA vzw, Random Scream, Jan Martens, John The House Band, ... which indicates that the respondents use a broad definition of the terms 'company' and 'collective'.

⁶ This overall finding differs from the results of the 2014 CUDOS-report (Siongers, Van Steen and Lievens 2014), which teaches us that half of the Flemish actors have at least one child. Perhaps a job in Flemish theater, film and/or television is easier to combine with parenthood since this involves more regular daytime work compared to the highly mobile transnational contemporary dance scene?

necessarily being their primary reason). Other motivations, such as 'irregular hours', 'remaining flexible' and 'low free time', are equally marked more than ten times as a top three reason.

2. Income

When asked about their medium monthly net income in the past year, more than half of all queried dance artists indicate that they earned less than 1.250 euros per month on an average basis, thus *Figure I.1* shows. According to their income, the respondents can be categorized in four relatively equal groups, i.e. those earning (1) less than or equal to 1.000 euros per month; (2) between 1.000 and 1.250 euros; (3) between 1.250 and 1.500 euros; and (4) more than 1.500 euros per month. Merely 8% of the respondents earn more than 2.000 euros. Three-quarters of the respondents earn maximally 1.500 euros, which does not seem very much, particularly not in light of the high educational level of the queried group. Yet are the dancers themselves also of this opinion? Do they consider themselves as 'under-earners'?

We first asked the contacted dance artists the average monthly net income they actually need. *Figure I.2* demonstrates that they can be again classified into four groups according to mentioned income level. However, the weight now slightly shifts from the lowest category (max. 1000 euros) to the second one. Quite strikingly, more than half of all respondents state that they need 1.250 euros or less. For sure, Brussels is a fairly economical capital compared to London and Paris, but it is certainly not the cheapest place to rent in Belgium. Moreover, dance artists have to invest in their bodies in order to remain employable. This entails costs for training (master classes, workshops, auditions, yoga...) and health (osteopathy, physiotherapy, massage...); besides that, there are costs for networking such as buying theatre tickets and travel costs. Nevertheless, it seems as if most respondents have learned to cover all these costs with their rather meager salary and to survive with it: they say that they do not really need (much) more than they actually earn. In a word, besides being dance artists they also appear being survival artists. Probably a combination of factors is at play here is: the factual accommodation to one's material situation, thus also avoiding feelings of so-called relative deprivation (i.e. knowing that there are not many genuine chances to improve one's situation substantially), the choice for a relatively non-consumerist lifestyle, and – perhaps most importantly – the compensation of a relatively low income by a professional activity one really likes and that implicates in an often direct, non-estranging mode one's self and personal capacities (compare Abbing 2002).

We subsequently asked the respondents the average monthly net income they deem appropriate for the work they perform. As *Figure I.3* indicates, the balance now shifts to the higher income categories we already discerned. When considering the previous division into four categories, the majority appertain to the highest category of more than 1.500 euros. Taking a closer look reveals that now three quarters can be almost equally found in the categories of 1.500 – 1.750 euros, 1.750 – 2.000 euros and 2.000 – 2.500 euros. About 13% of the respondents find an average monthly income of

2.250 euros or more appropriate, which is a fairly low percentage. Not that they deny the importance of remuneration with regard to their artistic work: nine percent of the queried dance artists are neutral toward payment, whereas the rest finds it important to very important.

Overall, the answers to the questions on the average monthly income they need and deem appropriate respectively prove that at least the Brussels dance artists we contacted are prepared to work for relatively little money. Our figures demonstrate that we may effectively speak of a probably widespread form of *self-precarization* within the Brussels dance community. As Isabell Lorey (2015: 39) points out, precarization is today to a great extent a specific mode of governance: people are normalized through processes of socio-economic precarization. For a long time, flexible work formats and, concomitantly, an insecure income were considered to be the unwanted exceptions to the rule of full-time employment and a permanent contract; yet within the prevailing neoliberal context, what was once the exception increasingly becomes the norm. However, particularly within the creative professions precarization-as-coercion is seconded by self-precarization: 'external precarization induced by the meanwhile institutionalized neoliberal or post-Fordist regime of flexible artistic accumulation is intrinsically interwoven with a partly voluntary self-precarization, stemming from the desire to be a creative subject.' (Laermans, 2015: 291). Precisely this self-precarization is reflected in the results of our three questions on the actual, needed and appropriate monthly income. The figures on the average income of the queried dance artists, and their attitude toward it, demonstrate that there exists a voluntary basis, or self-precarization, among the them, which is driven by a supposed immaterial 'income', such as the benefits of a relatively autonomous life that they are able to lead and which is first and foremost dedicated to their artistic preoccupations (see also further: 6. Motivation and satisfaction). One of our respondents actually noted this self-precarization explicitly: s/he concludes that s/he undervalues her/his personal work and underestimates her/his need for or right to a proper salary: *'It is confronting that when asked before 'how much I feel I need' or 'how much I should earn', I was first tempted to keep the amounts very low. It is interesting to be confronted with that and I believe we need to change this attitude.'*

However, it must be kept in mind that the respondents were asked to estimate their monthly net income, which does not necessarily come from salaried work exclusively. We should indeed note that we are dealing with a multiple income, a patchwork of several earnings not necessarily stemming exclusively from artistic activities. In order to get more insight in the level of precarity reflected in the just commented figures, we will compare them with the official Flemish/Belgian minimum wage scales in the performing arts as well as with the amounts in the unemployment allowances and the social integration benefit called 'living wage', tailored to the official minimum subsistence level and issued by the communal public centers for social welfare (OCMW) (for an overview of these amounts, see *Annex 3*). It turns out that at least one-fifth of our respondents earn less than the so-called living wage of 833,71 euros for a single person living alone; 12% of them gain even less than 555,81 euros, the individual

minimum for someone living together. Moreover, 30% of respondents earn less than the Belgian minimum unemployment allowance of 972,14 euros. When comparing our data to the minimum wage scale within the CLA Performing Arts, we stumble over the difficulty of likening an average net monthly income with a gross minimum salary. Theoretically, all performing artists and creators belong to salary group A; however, wage scale C always counts as a minimum scale for the employees with a job description under group A working for employers receiving a subsidy lower than 301.852 euros indexed (260.000 euros initially)⁷. We therefore compare to wage scale C when referring to the minimum income. The gross-net calculator by *sdworks*⁸ converts the gross minimum salary of wage scale C (i.e. 1.766,25 euros) to a net salary fitting the following profile: single and living alone, no children, employee, full-time, 38-hours-per-week-contract, no extra benefits. This results in a monthly net income of 1.460,04 euros⁹. Observing that three-quarters of our respondents indicate that they earn less than 1.500 euros net per month, we may tentatively conclude that the majority have a monthly income that is lower than the official minimum wage for performing artists.

Evidently, income tends to grow with age. It therefore does not come as a surprise that some studies have found that poverty in the arts predominates at a young age (Siongers, Van Steen and Lievens 2014; Sorignet 2010). Nevertheless, poverty at an older age is also a structural possibility in the dance profession; indeed, several consequences of the lack of benefits and securities only emerge at a certain age¹⁰. However this may be, *Figure J* demonstrates that among our respondents the youngest generation is indeed the poorest one: half of those between 21 and 30 years old earn only up to maximally 1.000 euros per month. Not even one-fifth of the youngest category has an income higher than a monthly average of more than 1.250 euros. Within the second age category (31 to 40 years old), more than half of the respondents earn maximally 1.250 euros; on the contrary, within the third category (41 to 50 years old), around 80% of the contacted dancers earn minimally 1.250 euros. The oldest respondents all earn more than 1.500 euros¹¹. The figure also suggests that this income increase goes hand in hand with the number of years of work experience, yet further statistical analysis proves this correlation to be more complex¹².

⁷ Note that minimum wage scales are always determined per sector; we can therefore not compare to a general minimum wage scale for Flanders or Belgium. These wage scales include legal benefits determined by the government (Christmas bonus, holiday fee), but an employer can decide to add supplementary benefits such as meal vouchers and health or hospitalization insurances.

⁸ See <http://www.vacature.com/testen-tools/bruto-netto-calculator>

⁹ For calculations of net incomes as well as calculations of unemployment allowances, living together is an important factor (even if it does not imply official cohabitation). For the minimum wage, however, living together or living alone does not make a difference.

¹⁰ E.g. low retirement fees, absence of seniority (which refrains a salary from growing), and insufficient health and hospitalization insurances (which bring high costs when injured or ill).

¹¹ The aspect of 'drop-out' probably plays a significant role here: those who still earn less than 1.500 euros at a certain age are more likely to leave the profession.

¹² A multivariate analysis of the data indeed teaches us that there exists a complex relationship between earnings, age and number of years of work experience. Whereas age has a positive effect on the chance to earn more than 1.250 euros, experience has a negative but non-significant effect. This does not imply that age is more important than work experience. Yet the interaction-effects between age and years of work experience are significant, which results in the conclusion that the number of years of work experience has a positive but non-significant

With regard to the past five years, most respondents observe a change in income. Whereas 21% say their income has fluctuated, more than a third of them indicate that it increased; 30% of the queried dance artists state that their income has remained rather stable, which suggests that seniority is often not taken into account by employers¹³. We therefore found it interesting to contrast the official seniority calculations for performing artists according to wage scale C (which prescribes the minimum wage for artists) with those of another profession in which a professional or academic Bachelor degree is usual. *Annex 3* offers a comparison with the profession of teacher in secondary education (first or second grade), which is also dominated by temporary contracts during the first years of work experience. It is immediately clear that the salary for teachers seems to increase much more rapidly than the remuneration for performing artists. This is all the more noteworthy if we take into account that teachers will be able to continue working at an older age while most contemporary dance artists have to refrain from dancing sooner due to the high demands in physicality. The official seniority calculations for the performing arts do indeed not properly take this specific feature into account.

3. Status of artist

The earlier discussed figures suggest that contemporary dance artists undergo a double process of precarization, one that is externally imposed through the neoliberal regime of artistic accumulation and one that is self-imposed. However, the notion of precarity refers to a situation of long-lasting socio-economic insecurity or structural vulnerability (Standing 2011; 2014). Due to the so-called artist status, this does not apply to a substantial number of our respondents. Although it is often regarded to be so, the status of artist is in fact not a separate category within the Belgian social security regime (so with distinct social security contributions and a particular protection); rather, it fits the artist into the existing statuses¹⁴. More particularly, the status enables the application of the employee status in a work regime of multiple jobholding and flexible contracts. As a consequence, artists can receive unemployment allowances in-between employment contracts, which evidently enhances their overall socio-economic security from a temporal point of view. Actually, the status of artist comes with several benefits, but the coverage of periods of non-work through employment benefits is undoubtedly the most important one.

We hypothesize that for those benefitting from it, the status of artist transforms 'objective' or socio-economic precarity into *semi-precariety* since it creates a situation in

direct effect on the chance to earn more than 1.250 euro's within the youngest age category. Moreover, there is no effect in the age category 31-40; and within the age category, 41-50, the effect even becomes negative.

¹³ However, this statement should be refined taking into account that some of these respondents may or may not have simply worked less in those five years or that a lesser amount of work has been counted.

¹⁴ The status of artist can be obtained when someone performing artistic labor is able to prove that s/he has worked a specified number of days or earned a stipulated amount of task rewards (the so-called *cachet* calculation) over a certain period of time. See <http://www.kunstenloket.be> for the regulations and *Annex 4* for statistics from RVA (Rijksdienst voor Arbeidsvoorziening, the official Belgian agency for unemployment).

which one has a stable and guaranteed income. The status of artist may therefore be exploited as the equivalent of a basic income. However, it should be kept in mind that the status of artist is actually a social security notion and may therefore probably be preferentially regarded as a particular kind of *flexicurity provision*.¹⁵ The well-known question whether creativity flourishes within the context of long-term contracts or is rather served by a high level of employment and project mobility through flexible contracts (Forrier 2007) thus comes down to finding a balance between flexibility and protection. The status of artist effectively attempts to offer a socio-economic protection that is customized to the corresponding sector by taking into account the predominance of short employment relationships. The flexicurity approach, in the strict sense, actually offers a different take on socio-economic security since it connects a high level of employment security with a high flexibility rate by looking past the limitations of one job (hence the idea of boundaryless or protean careers). Flexicurity therefore goes hand in hand with the enhancement of employability, or the ability to obtain and maintain employment through the mastering of new skills or competences (see further Auer 2010). Also, employment relationships based on flexicurity require that wage scales and legal regulations be tuned to one another instead of being primarily tailored to long-term employment relationships.

More than half of our respondents enjoy the status of artist. *Figure K* shows that those without the status of artist predominantly belong to the lowest average monthly net income categories. Only 16% of those having the status earn less than or equal to 1.000 euros net per month, whereas almost half of those without the status belong to this group. One-third of the respondents without the status earn only up to 750 euros per month, of which half earn even maximally 500 euros. In comparison, only 10% of those benefitting the status of artist gain maximally 750 euros. Half of them earn at least 1.250 euros on an average monthly basis, while this only holds for 39% of those without this status. Notably, the majority (82%) of the respondents that obtained the status of artist are also member of a labor union to protect their rights¹⁶.

Not unimportantly, we find a statistically significant relationship between the variables of the respondents' age, years of work experience and years of Belgian residency when compared with enjoying the status of artist. More than half of those without this status belong to the youngest age category and have the least years of work experience. On the contrary, the dance artists who obtained the status of artist are in average older, with the majority being over 30 years old and more than one-quarter being over 40. Furthermore, they have more work experience: more than two-thirds have been working for at least ten years (as opposed to one-third in the group without

¹⁵ We note that the system of the status of artist is currently questioned among artists because it seems to disregard those who are employed on a long-term basis. Also, the control on the artists benefitting from this framework has become more severe: the maintenance of this status is jeopardized. See also the press conference of the Actor's Guild in Antwerp on February 1, 2016 as reported by De Standaard: http://www.standaard.be/cnt/dmf20160201_02103288).

¹⁶ This is due to the fact that labor unions adopt the role of payment institution for unemployment allowances (next to the independent unemployment benefits fund, i.e. Hulpkas voor Werkloosheidsuitkeringen). However, there is also a possible role shift of the labor unions here: perhaps artists tend to deploy their labor union for administering their paperwork – or at least help with it - rather than for protection?

status of artist). Also, they have been Belgian resident for a longer time; both groups, however, contain an equal percentage of respondents with Belgian citizenship. These observations indicate that contemporary dance artists are more likely to obtain the status of artist when they have already been working for several years and thus also when they are of an older age. This has partly to do with the specific requirements to acquire this status, such as the proof of a sufficient income – usually translated into working days – stemming from artistic work. We moreover note that a significant relation exists between having children and enjoying the status of artist: whereas 36% of the respondents with the artist status have children, only 14% of those without this status take up the role of mother or father. Although this suggests that the socio-economic security coming with the status of artist stimulates parenthood, we must of course take into consideration that the concerned group also tends to be of an older age, which obviously plays a significant role in the decision for parenthood.

The status of artist enables the application of the employee status for job-hopping artists; consequently, the latter should in principle be able to enjoy the same benefits and securities that come with this employee status. However, the data in *Figure L* show that contemporary dance artists actually have few social benefits and securities. This is quite remarkable in light of the fact that half of our respondents have the status of artist. Whereas two-thirds say they have private health insurance, only 38% mark that they have it through their employer. Merely 28% of the queried Brussels dance artists have private hospitalization insurance, of which again a meager 9% enjoy it as a fringe benefit through their employer. While more than half of them indicate that they do receive a holiday fee, merely one respondent receives a Christmas bonus¹⁷. A few respondents do not really know which benefits or securities they enjoy and 3% of them indicate they have none. Furthermore, in order to ensure a feasible retirement pension, a small but notable number (19%) started a private retirement plan. Also, less than half of all respondents state that they enjoy seniority and a similar number claim that they do not have the right to unemployment allowances.

The data in *Figure L.2* show a significant relation between the status of artist and seniority, being entitled to unemployment allowances and receiving a holiday fee. *Figure M* reveals that seniority seems to be rather equally divided over the various age and work experience categories. However, those with the status of artist are much more likely to have seniority calculated in their salary¹⁸ (54% as opposed to 27%) and to receive a holiday fee (68% compared to 46%). As a matter of fact, the status of artist legally obliges employers to apply the wage scales of the CLA Performing Arts and, therefore, to take into account seniority when determining someone's wage. However, it must be noted that employers can follow different paths when calculating the seniority benefits of employees who have mostly worked under short-employment contracts during their career. Either they add up all contracts (which is rather disadvantageous for

¹⁷ According to the CLA Performing Arts, the Christmas bonus is included within the salary for employment contracts of less than four months. Perhaps a number of respondents working under short employment contracts are not aware of this fact.

¹⁸ See also the logistic regression graph in *Figure M.2*.

the employee) or they count the number of calendar years of work experience (which is more advantageous). Given the status of artist, all artists benefitting from it should be entitled to unemployment allowances¹⁹. Of those respondents not enjoying the status of artist, only one-fifth have the right to unemployment allowances. Additionally, the data reveal that all respondents without Belgian citizenship but with Belgian residency for more than ten years are entitled to unemployment benefits.

4. Employment

We already suggested more than once that the job market for contemporary dance artists mainly consists of short-term contracts tailored to the specific duration of a project, one company season or even the couple of days necessary for the rehearsal and re-performance of an existing show. *Figure O* teaches us that merely 11% of the queried Brussels dance artists have worked under a longer-term contract (a year or more) with a company receiving structural subsidies. However, almost half of them had a contract for one production or one season with such a company. The majority of the respondents have worked freelance²⁰ in the past five years (88%), with those benefitting the status of artist dominating within this group. Nearly 6 in 10 have used alternative sources to secure their income such as unemployment allowances, teaching fees... ; again, those with the status of artist predominate. Of those working – or having worked – as freelancer, 79% mark that they have used short employment contracts; about 65% of them handled their contracts via alternative management bureaus (e.g. Klein Verzet, Hiros, Caravan Productions), workspaces (e.g. wpZimmer, Pianofabriek, WorkSpaceBrussels) or pay roll agencies (e.g. SMartBE). In both situations, the respondents enjoying the status of artist predominate²¹. These numbers again indicate that the status of artist can vouch for *flexicurity*.

The dance artists currently employed in one or several companies or collectives were also asked how they are being paid. *Figure P* shows that almost half of the respondents working for at least one company receive different salaries for rehearsal days and performance days; 16% obtain the same salary, 13% receive a monthly salary and 6% are only remunerated for performance days. Furthermore, the respondents were asked whether they are currently working as independent artists who finance themselves. This question probed the number of dance artists on the creating side rather than those on the performing side (in a company or a collective). About half of the respondents indicate that they were working as independent artists on the moment they completed the survey. When taking up this position, the majority work – or have worked

¹⁹ Nevertheless, 10% of our respondents with the status of artist indicate that they do not receive unemployment allowances. Presumably they do not receive these allowances because of long-term employment but are actually entitled to them.

²⁰ In the performing arts sector in Flanders the term freelance work relates to project work on the basis of short-term employment contracts with employers, management bureaus, workspaces or pay roll agencies. By contrast, artists working under the self-employed status are rare in Flanders, although this can occur among stage, sound and light technicians in the arts.

²¹ It should be noted that less than half of the freelance workers state that they have acquired project subsidies in the past five years.

– through another organization that manages projects (e.g. management bureaus); 44% of have their own organization and 35% claim they are self-employed when working independently.

According to Menger (2014), artists often end up in the rather unattractive situation of multiple jobholding in order to earn enough money to survive. Among contemporary dance artists, the level of multiple jobholding seems indeed very high: nearly 8 in 10 of our respondents say they have more than one job. However, only 19% earn more with their para- and non-artistic activities than with artistic labor. We employ a broad definition of the latter: it includes creating, rehearsing and performing as well as the related preparatory and administrative work. Thus defined, most of the jobs performed by our respondents in a situation of multiple jobholding are activities related to artistic labor. We actually asked to indicate the percentage of work time spend on artistic, para-artistic and non-artistic activities respectively given a hypothetical work time budget totaling 100%²². The majority of the respondents say that 70% of their time goes to artistic activities; only one-fifth of the queried dance artists devote maximally half of their work time to artistic labor. Most of them only spend between zero and 30% of their work time on para-artistic activities (such as teaching or writing) and an absolute majority devotes merely 10% or less of that same work time to non-artistic activities (such as bar tending or baby-sitting). The average time budget for artistic work, para-artistic activities and non-artistic work amounts to 74%, 20% and 6% respectively. When dividing the artistic activities into two categories, one comprising creative-productive work and the other administrative-organizational tasks, we observe that two-thirds of all respondents are able to devote more than half of their artistic work time to the first one. The percentage of their work time going to administrative or organizational tasks rather fluctuates. In average, 63% of the artistic time budget is spent on creative-productive activities. These results suggest that Brussels-based contemporary dance artists can in fact still spent a fair amount of their time to predominantly artistic activities, in the strict sense.

5. Working conditions: time, nationality & mobility

Are the inhabitants of the Brussels contemporary dance scene rather easy-going? Or do their lives, on the contrary, tend to the kind of strong entanglement of life and work that characterizes the so-called biopolitical economy and its immaterial labor as sketched by Michael Hardt & Antonio Negri (2009)? And how much of their labor is actually paid? When we look to the average number of remunerated working hours per week, *Figure Q* shows that the respondents are paid up to a maximum of 40 hours per week (with the exception of 4% of them). They can actually be divided into four categories of approximately the same size: those remunerated for (1) up to 10 hours per week; (2) between 11 and 20 hours; (3) between 21 and 30 paid hours; and (4) between 31 to 40 hours per week. Compared to the average 38-hour workweek of the so-called ‘normal’

²² Para-artistic activities involve teaching, lecturing and writing; non-artistic activities refer to practices such as bar tending, baby-sitting etc.

fulltime and permanently employed worker, three-quarters of the respondents tend to be poorly remunerated. However, yet another picture emerges when looking at the table featuring all working hours, regardless of remuneration. The number of queried dance artists working less than 20 hours per week is very low and represents a mere 9%. More than half of all them work between 31 and 50 hours per week and one-quarter even over 50 hours a week. Moreover, *Figure Q* shows that almost half of the respondents are remunerated for maximally half of their actual working hours. These numbers represent a grim reality and suggest that a substantial number of contemporary dance artists indeed undergo the reality of both the contemporary biopolitical economy and the neoliberal regime of flexible accumulation and exploitation.

Figure R reveals that most respondents were born in Europe (70%); about 1 in 5 of them are native Belgian. The majority of those not born in Europe, were born in the US. The figure on citizenship teaches us that the majority of respondents have European citizenship (of which almost half have Belgian citizenship); one-fifth of the respondents have non-European citizenship and the remaining 17% have combined citizenship. From these numbers can be inferred that 7% of the respondents were not born in Belgium but have meanwhile gained Belgian citizenship. A whopping 65% of the respondents without Belgian citizenship have their residence in Belgium between five and 20 years²³. We note that P.A.R.T.S. was founded in 1995, which has greatly facilitated the influx of foreign dance artists as reflected in the above-cited number. About 18% of the respondents without Belgian citizenship are currently dealing with legal issues, which amounts to 12% of the total sample population. Additionally, a small number of respondents mention that they currently have a work permit, but that they have previously worked in Belgium illegally. However, the majority of the queried artists do not need such a permit and one-quarter are in possession of a work permit valid for one year or longer.

Contemporary dance artists not only hop from job to project, but are also considered to be highly territorially mobile: they temporarily work abroad, have residencies in another country, tour... In order to gain some more insight in their mobility level, we asked the respondents where they worked during the last five years. As indicated by *Figure S*, they had the choice among the following locations: (1) home; (2) personal studio (rented, company-owned); (3) theater; (4) café, train, airplane or hotel room; and (5) multiple workspaces or residency spaces. The majority of our respondents mostly work in residency or workspaces, from home and/or in a theater. More than half of them conduct their work anywhere, such as in a café, train, airplane or hotel room. Evidently, different activities will probably be carried out in these different locations. Of the many respondents (9 in 10) working in residency or workspaces, more than half say that they actually work in Belgium; about 30% of these artists are primarily active in Flanders, including Brussels. The other half of our respondents mostly work outside Belgium, predominantly in Western Europe. Overall, this figure confirms the standard picture of the transnational character of the contemporary dance

²³ At the moment they filled in the questionnaire, four respondents had not (yet) applied for official residency in Belgium; subsequently, they still had another European country as their place of residence.

profession, yet it simultaneously puts it into perspective since about half of our respondents working in residency or workspaces do not regularly cross the Belgian border in order to do so.

6. Motivation and satisfaction

Asked to rank their top three motives for being active within the field of contemporary dance, the respondents predominantly mentioned artistic pleasure (70%), lifelong learning (49%) and self-development (35%), followed by autonomy, collaboration and the idea of a calling. Artistic pleasure is the top choice of one-third of the respondents, followed by calling and lifelong learning. Quite strikingly, recognition was never ranked as a top or secondary motive and flexibility, overlap between work and private sphere as well as mobility were only marked once or twice.

We also measured the queried artists' job satisfaction on a scale going from one (very dissatisfied) to five (very satisfied). By disregarding those who have no opinion or remain neutral, the scale was afterwards reduced to two extreme categories (satisfied vs. dissatisfied). In general, the respondents seem (very) satisfied about their profession, with a majority being especially satisfied about collaboration, artistic expression, work environment, community, audiences' resonance, mobility and flexibility. Only the dimensions of 'future perspectives' and 'planning' are found somewhat dissatisfactory by almost one-third of the sample population. By employing the technique of factor analysis, we could further reduce the positively valued elements to three underlying dimensions that have to do with temporality, sociability and flexibility respectively. The dimension of temporality includes 'working hours', 'planning' and 'leisure', which all three refer to time management. Given the positive appreciation, we may assume that within this dimension the respondents particularly value the chances for temporal autonomy. The second dimension of sociability refers to the social-intrinsic aspects of the performed work such as 'collaboration', 'work environment', 'artistic expression' and 'community'. The latter factor may include 'audiences' resonance', but the weight of this variable is not very significant and of little substantive importance. The third dimension of flexibility only includes mobility and flexibility (in the strict sense) and represents the flexible managing of work in a highly mobile labor environment. The aspect 'future perspectives' does not belong to any of these three dimensions and is experienced in diverse modes. At first sight, one's socio-economic status seems a crucial factor. More particularly, we observe that the respondents with a net monthly income of maximum 1.250 euros are mostly dissatisfied about their future perspectives. However, no significant relationships result from the comparison of the satisfaction level and the average income categories through cross tabulation analysis. This indicates that professional satisfaction does not depend on income: the queried dance artists are in general satisfied with their profession regardless of the level of their income. Also when comparing the satisfaction level with enjoying or not enjoying the status of artist, which makes a notable difference in socio-economic (in)security, no significant relationship was found. We consider these findings once again indicative for the already signaled

tendency toward self-precarization within the Brussels contemporary dance community.

7. Brussels and the contemporary dance profession

When asked about the reasons for living in Brussels, the most recurring answers to this open question are ‘work opportunities’, ‘Brussels’ scene’ and ‘Brussels as a base’. The top motive for living in Belgium’s capital, ‘work opportunities’, also includes training possibilities, job offers as well as lifelong learning prospects. When referring to the attractive scene, the respondents may mean the dance scene in particular or the cultural or arts scene in general. Those valuing Brussels as a base do so by stating that the city is ‘geographically interesting’, a ‘strategic place’ or a ‘travel hub’. Additionally, some respondents specifically state that it is the ideal ‘artistic meeting point’ or ‘cross point’ for artists in Europe.²⁴

Another open question probed the respondents’ feelings about their social standing as a professional dance artist: do people in general take them seriously? Several respondents actually compared the profession’s standing in Belgium or Europe to the respect it receives elsewhere, claiming for instance that the position of dance artist is particularly taken seriously in Belgium. More specifically, two trends stand out in the responses. First, the prevailing socio-economic working conditions are denounced as failing to reflect the general symbolic respect the profession receives. Up to 24% of the respondents observe that although the dance profession is respected as a full-fledged one, this esteem does not translate into proper working conditions. Accordingly, a respondent remarks that “generally, people respect what I do, or at least they say so. But society does not ‘pay’ so”. Respondents mention issues such as the amount of payment in relation to work effort and invested time, the absence of a career-bound salary and the abundance of voluntary made expenses. Most significantly, the dancers’ bodies are not acknowledged as their primary means of production. In general, the contemporary dance profession is perceived as a struggle, a risk or a ‘day fight job’.

A second trend involves the perception of the profession as a hobby rather than as a genuine job. A relatively large number of respondents say they are regularly confronted, directly or indirectly, with the question “Yes, but what is your real job?” The dance profession is often regarded as ‘commercial entertainment’ or a ‘euphemism for stripper’ and people are surprised one can make a living of it because they associate it with a hobby. In turn, a small but significant number of respondents consider themselves ‘lucky’ or ‘privileged’ to have made it as a dance professional with an established income or working in a steady company job, yet without perceiving their situation as being average.

²⁴ Other reasons include education, community, network, family, infrastructure, support, affordability, cosmopolitanism, lifestyle, social security...

8. Summary and discussion

Since we cannot assess the representativeness of the presented data, we have to be cautious when drawing conclusions. Indeed, we do not know to what extent the 94 queried dance artists, and the substrata within this population, do mirror the opinions or concerns of those making up the Brussels dance community. Nevertheless, some tentative general conclusions do not just seem appropriate but impose themselves in light of the gathered data. Evidently, they are first and foremost 'food for thought' and, particularly, 'food for discussion'.

1. Overall, the contemporary dance profession seems marked by a multifaceted socio-economic precarity. Our contemporary sample of Brussels based dance artists comprises a highly educated group, with 81% of the respondents having a bachelor's degree or higher, an average age that lies between 34 and 35 years old and a medium work experience between 11 and 12 years. However, the average monthly net income (defined in relation to the year preceding the moment the questionnaire was completed) of more than half of all respondents amounts to less than €1.250. Three-quarters of all respondents earn maximally €1.500 per month, which means that the majority of the respondents barely earn the official minimum net wage for performing artists. Besides, almost half of them are remunerated for only up to half of their actual working hours.
2. The level of multiple jobholding seems very high: the majority of the respondents have worked freelance in the past five years and nearly 8 in 10 of them have more than one job. However, most of the jobs performed by the queried dance artists in a situation of multiple jobholding are activities related to artistic labor.
3. Our sample suggests that the contemporary dance profession is highly transnational and is generally practiced by international dance artists who are active in a mobile work environment. Most respondents of the Brussels dance community were born in Europe (70%) with about 1 in 5 respondents Belgian-born. Of the many respondents (9 in 10) working in residency or workspaces, 52% say that they actually work in Belgium and the other half of the queried artists mostly work outside Belgium, predominantly in Western Europe. This confirms the standard picture of the transnational character of the profession, yet it simultaneously puts it into perspective.
4. The status of artist, as outlined within the Belgian social security system, may reduce the precarity reflected in our data to semi-precarity through the flexicurity it actually provides. In 2015, up to 8.626 artists have received unemployment allowances under the 'status of artist'-regulation in the periods they did not work. Given the predominance of short-term contracts within the world of contemporary dance, this kind of safety net is crucial for those working in this artistic field. However, so far only half of the queried dance artists had access to this status. Also, the data show that contemporary dance artists have few social benefits and securities, which is quite remarkable in light of the fact that half of our respondents have access to the status of artist.

5. The Belgian status of artist also serves as a legal liability for employers to follow the official wage scales of the CLA Performing Arts. Particularly the obligation to pay an employee according to seniority significantly contributes to the recognition of dance artists' work in the form of a pay raise. However, in a project-oriented work regime dominated by short-employment contracts, different paths can be taken in order to calculate the number of years of work experience. Either an employer adds up all short contracts, which is rather disadvantageous for the employed dance artist; or s/he simply calculates in calendar years, which besides being more advantageous, is just a matter of fairness since work experience in the arts may also enhance when one is not under contract. Indeed, as also our data suggest, most artists keep on practicing their profession in a situation of non-employment. For that matter: this observation is an additional argument for a simultaneously generous, well thought-out and fair revision of the status of artist-regime.
6. In light of a multifaceted work-centered approach in the social regulation of artistic labor, the status of artist-regime should be principally considered as the harbinger of a flexicurity system and not as providing the implicit equivalent of a basic income. Overall, the accessibility to the status of artist must be simplified in order to further reduce the precarity among artists in general and among dance artists in particular. It is incongruous that the career path of an artist is imperatively organized as an accumulation of short-employment contracts on the one hand, but the rules and regulations are lagging behind this reality on the other. Hence, it is unjust that the access to the artist status is difficult to attain for young or aspiring artists. Also, the benefits and securities going hand in hand with the status should be better adapted to the particularities of each artistic profession. All the above-mentioned realities should be taken into account when revising the status of artist-regime and the CLA Performing Arts in terms of a better-adapted economy of work. Indeed, together with a lowering of the threshold, a more differentiated status of artist-regime should be envisaged.
7. Last but not least, our data confirm the existence of a considerable degree of self-precarization among dance artists. Notwithstanding their low income and few securities or benefits, the respondents are generally very satisfied with their profession. Moreover, most of them do not feel that they need a higher income, though they would find this appropriate. However, the average net monthly income deemed appropriate by most of our respondents is modest. These observations fit the logic underlying artistic self-precarization: one is willing to sacrifice material benefits for the sake of immaterial ones such as artistic pleasure, temporal autonomy, a relatively egalitarian work setting and regular chances for self-development. The power to say 'no' to unfair socio-economic conditions lies within the collective, yet many artists are 'post-materially' motivated and therefore willing to accept their precarious situation. However, we also note by way of conclusion that the logics of precarization and, particularly, self-precarization are also resisted by artists through various modes of self-organization (such as State of the Arts, or SoTA) and collective care, or artist-run initiatives, which may all be linked to Judith Butler's famous

statement that ‘the body is and is not mine’ (Butler, 2004: 21). Moreover, numerous debates on fair practices in the arts were recently organized, also in Brussels.²⁵ Nevertheless, most debates recurrently disregard the issue of social security: it should be kept in mind that a fair income does not guarantee social security or financial stability. Nonetheless, advocating fair practices in the arts is trending and this emphasizes the recognition of sustainable material and immaterial work conditions in the arts.

Through the in-depth investigation of all dimensions of precarity in contemporary dance, including aesthetic ones, the qualitative phase of this project will further explore the choreographies of precariousness within the Brussels dance scene. We assume that individual dance artists perform these proverbial scores with various degrees of reflexivity and consent, detachedness and resistance.

²⁵ See particularly the symposium ‘Solidarity. How do we work together?’ that was organized by SOTA, NICC, oKo, Hoogtijd, ACOD culture, Kunstenloket and Kunstenpunt on February 27, 2016 in Brussels within the framework of the long-term project ‘Towards Fair Practices in The Arts’; see also http://www.stateofthearts.eu/?page_id=830.