

Musical entrepreneurs in West Africa?

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Culture and Creative Economy

In the so-called developed countries, cultural and creative economy stands as one of the most dynamic sectors of activities. In London, one of the most dynamic global cities, the creative and cultural industries stand as the third largest industry. Increasingly, analysts, researchers and policy makers have pointed to the fact that cultural production is itself a major sector of the economy and that it is growing at a rate beyond that of the rest of the economy.

“Developing countries, including the least developed countries, are conceivably better positioned to compete in cultural industries than in many traditional industries. This is because the basic raw material, such as the talent to create musical sounds, is readily available and entry costs, at least in the case of music, are not as prohibitive as in many industries.”¹

Potential of music economy in West Africa

The cultural and creative economy has been increasingly considered as a potential contribution to the economic growth of developing countries. With respect, music economy could well encourage a sustainable and integrated development of least advanced economies, such as those of Francophone West Africa, if only insightful and meaningful information appreciating the full music production system locally were provided as robust evidence based for policy-making.

“We need to export more in Burkina Faso than cotton! [...] In Burkina Faso, the government wants the private enterprises to help the artists as if they were public enterprises but they are private structure working with bank loans and with a need of getting back on their investment. This whole thing is just like a fight we have to make for the following generations.”

(Interview #16, music maker and worker, Ouagadougou)

¹ KOZUL-WRIGHT, Z. (2003) “Challenges and Prospects in the Music Industry for Developing Countries”, Third United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries, Proceedings of the Youth Forum, Music Industry Workshop, United Nations, New-York & Geneva. pp.11-12

Through the lens of a community of practice

The situated experiences of West African musical entrepreneurs offer great insights into the broader social structures and spatial specificities of cultural production in which their community practice.

Rationale for a qualitative (situated and grounded) approach to the object of research

- Absence of secondary data on the local music economy
- Cultural and creative workers rely intensively on tacit knowledge
- Information is transformed into knowledge only through individual participation and experience

“We can know more than we can tell” (Polanyi, 1966)

Constellations of West African Musical Entrepreneurs

1 / Local cultural entrepreneurs (opportunistic)

- Music workers only
- Promote music as an economic activity ensuring individual career development and international consumption
- Rely intensively on external funding of cultural cooperation services/ organisations (non autonomous creation of capital)
- Primary visible enablers in local-global interactions among musical workers

2 / Cosmopolitan musical entrepreneurs (aesthetical)

- Music workers and makers
- Promote music as an sustainable activity ensuring the amelioration of the local conditions of production
- Are not dependent on their music-related activities to make a living
- Less motivated by a desire of becoming visible than by a wish of rendering the local field of their practices visible

3 / Hip hop entrepreneurs (artistic)

- Music workers and makers
- Promote music as an sustainable and economic activity ensuring the development of the local conditions of production and consumption
- Rely on a self-accumulated capital to initiate their enterprises
- Reconcile production and consumption imperatives both locally and globally to offer an integrated development of the sector

“At the beginning, it was not meant to be a festival but just an evening ceremony rewarding the hip hop actors. I transformed it into a festival for the 3rd edition when I understood [...] that in order to get funding a cultural event has to be an international one.”
(Interview #26, music exploiter, Dakar)

“It was a place of gathering as we had rooms for artistic residencies as well as a recording studio, a showroom and a swimming pool as well as a courtyard where we were holding reception [...]. It was a place which mainly welcomed new talents who had difficulties in getting access to the few spaces of diffusion in Senegal [...] and many young artists got spotted thanks to their passage there!”
(Interview #30, music worker, Dakar)

“[...] an artist who does not make money out of his record cannot pay much for a studio recording. [...] However, this state of affairs does not kill the creativity of MCs and they start to organise themselves differently: people who have studios do also video production and not only for Hip Hop [...] and then, they reinvest it in Hip Hop! [...] they got inspired from the crisis [...] They have not been shaken by it but it has opened new paths for them!”
(Interview #20; Music maker and worker, Dakar)

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Creative community practicing cultural intermediation

Different identities inside the community of West African musical entrepreneurs emerge but with similar working practices, participating in the development of a local music economy.

- **Situated knowledge of their field of practice** (experiential understanding of both their locale and the global dynamics of the cultural and creative economy)
- **Alternative model of work** (passionate and affective bond with their practice as well as constant search for the originality of their contribution)
- **Insecurity and precariousness of their profession** (self-employment, portfolio career, ‘bulimic’ patterns of work, individualisation of risks: “the brave new world of work” (Beck, 2000))
- **Working and learning through nets** (project-based economy, traditional interpersonal system of the extended family, informal networking practices, ‘learning on the job’, self-training with ICTs)

“The reality is that artists themselves possess the solutions. [...] The cultural problem to be solved stands as a generation struggle; myself as an individual could not start and finish it but I truly hope to be part of the generation which will start it, conscientiously, not through revolt but through revolution.”

(Interview #19, Music maker and worker, Dakar)