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Independent Performing Arts in Europe. Between Institutional Consolidation and Precarity

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Abstract

The independent performing arts are becoming entrenched as an organizational field operating throughout the European continent. A Europe-wide comparative analysis focusing on structural characteristics that institutionally define the field has not yet been produced. This paper is intended to inspire the discussion. A prominent place in it is given to the field's socio-economic conditions, especially given the new challenges posed by the coronavirus pandemic. Subsequently, the measures taken by performing arts advocacy associations to improve the precarious status of the artists will illustrate the development of mutual awareness, patterns of international coalition and isomorphic alignment in the structuring of the field beyond nation state boundaries. Finally, the achievements made in cultural governance, and thus the constructive interaction between the state and advocacy organizations in addressing the challenges posed, are presented. The research is based on 1,031 survey responses from cultural professionals as well as expert interviews with executives of independent performing arts advocacy organizations from twelve European countries.

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Introduction

“The largest subsidy for the arts comes not from governments, patrons or the private sector, but from artists themselves in the form of unpaid or underpaid labor” (Neil 2019:6).

Since the 1960s, artists in Europe have been organizing independently as an alternative and in opposition to "permanent stages" (Brauneck 2016:13). Aiming to produce autonomously, they have asserted a position in the field of the arts that has endured for decades. The possibility of having their own mode of production is their key motivation, while the unifying element of independent performing arts does not seem to be aesthetics or thematic stance, but rather „die Ablehnung der wahrgenommenen Kontrolle durch die „Tradition“, vor allem des inszenierten Stücks und des „Apparats“ des Staats- und Stadttheaters“ (Balme 2021b). While self-reliant and autonomous action is central, “the project” is the means to realize productions beyond the “apparatus”. As a result, the independent performing arts do not generally operate on a location-bound basis, as we know it from permanent stages, but as temporary projects. These are under the direction of the artists themselves. They are characterized by often changing casts or funding sources, are flexible, and are oriented toward a network of production houses and an (inter)national context of theater festivals (Brauneck 2016; Matzke 2014). However, self-determined work in the performing arts also has its downsides. It appears as an extremely precarious field of work, which forces artists to permanent self-exploitation without offering any secure employment prospects (Roselt 2014:215). In an attempt to react to these deficits, agents work not only on their productions, but at the same time on their own institutionalization and its reflection (Matzke 2014:266).

That is how the German discourse used in theater studies can be read. Yet, precarious working conditions and an ongoing institutionalization are not only inherent to working in the field in Germany. EAIPA, the European Association of Independent Performing Arts, describes the situation across borders and highlights the grievances in terms of high levels of insecurity, low incomes, a heavy workload, and poor pension prospects in a variety of European countries (Eder 2018, 2021). By establishing political lobbying groups and associations at the regional, national and European levels, agents are embarking on a Europe-wide joint venture that promotes dialogue and cooperation and contributes to the institutional structuring of the field. In this way, they face the challenges described above and work to organize the field in a new, more socially acceptable manner. Together with cultural administrators and politicians, these lobbying groups work on the introduction and

maintenance of minimum standards and social safeguarding for independent performing arts professionals.

Since the 1980s, UNESCO has been calling for the freedom of art and the social security of its agents. It describes art as an integral part of democratic societies (UNESCO General Conference 1980); and yet, even in Europe, there is a considerable need for action with regard to social security and the appropriate remuneration of artistic work. Initial publications by advocacy groups, representing the independent field on a European level, note that even in well-funded countries, few artists are able to finance their work in such a way that their artistic goals can be realized without compromise, while at the same time maintaining minimum standards in terms of social security for all involved (Eder 2018, 2021; Staines 2004). Even though the field has established itself as a second pillar of the theater system in many European countries (Fülle 2016; Hensel 2016; Sabisch 2016), its continued existence is challenged, especially in light of the confrontation with the coronavirus pandemic. While these problems are addressed by agents or subsumed in studies covering multiple genres (Dent et al. 2020; Snijders et al. 2020), a nuanced scientific consideration of the socioeconomic situation of independent performing arts is absent for many countries and in European comparison. Figures are missing that provide information about how differentiated the field really is, that show how many performing arts professionals actually live a life below the at-risk-of-poverty-threshold and that document their precarious situation and lack of protection.

This report sets itself the central objective to conceptualize the field as a European phenomenon and to provide a data-based account of similarities and differences regarding its institutionalization, its social condition and its involvement in governance. It analyzes the socio-economic situation of its agents and the possibilities of political co-determination to improve this situation. Similarities and differences within the independent performing arts in a multitude of European countries are presented and thus a gap in knowledge relevant for science and practice will be closed.

Methodological Remarks

A quantitative survey was conducted with 1,031 respondents, consisting of approximately two-thirds individual performing arts professionals and one-third representatives of independent performing arts organizations. The quantitative account was complemented by semi-structured qualitative expert interviews with representatives of national advocacy groups in twelve European countries. A list of the associations can be found in appendix 1. In reference to the United Nations geo-scheme for Europe (United Nations Statistics Division 2022) Iceland, Sweden and Finland were considered representative of Northern

Europe, Romania, Bulgaria and Hungary of Eastern Europe, Italy and Slovenia of Southern Europe and the Czech Republic, Germany, Austria and Switzerland of Western Europe. In analyzing a domain that is still fairly unresearched, the epistemological interest is to study the field in an exploratory manner, both in compiling and comparing quantitative data that describe it in numbers, and in exploring governance processes that transform the field using qualitative methods. Triangulating the qualitative and the quantitative data in a mixed methods approach combines both aspects and is suitable to achieve this goal (Döring and Bortz 2016:73).

In an effort to establish methodological transparency, some limitations must be considered in advance. The population to be studied are the independent performing arts in Europe. A representative study would require a precise scientific definition of such a population. However, there is no reference that conceptually captures the field and without that definition, no sample can be defined and no representativeness can be claimed. Therefore, in all charts and figures, only the sample is referred to; not the population. The analysis subsequently aims to approximate the population in order to present indicators, to derive theses and to develop theory.

Advocacy groups for the independent performing arts are confronted with the same problem of representation as this study is, they represent not only their members, but the entire field vis-à-vis politics and the public. In reaction, they are endeavoring to set up their communication in such a way that they can do justice to this claim as much as possible. This is why they are the optimal starting point for conducting this investigation. EAIPA has 17 member associations as of January 2021, 14 of which, representing twelve countries, participated in distributing the online questionnaire by including a call for participation in their general communication channels (newsletters, websites and social media). The call was open from December 1, 2020 to February 28, 2021 and it was regularly promoted by the associations throughout the period. In addition, qualitative interviews were conducted with an executive from each association using semi-structured expert questionnaires including open-ended questions, between March 1 and April 31, 2021.

All 14 associations together have 7,173 members who could be addressed reliably through their channels. While most associations have both individuals and organizations as members, some have only artists and artist groups (e.g. in Austria, Bulgaria), others have only organizations and theaters as members (e.g. in Sweden), and still others operate as national umbrella associations that have only regional associations as members, which in turn represent organizations and individuals at the local level (e.g. in Germany). However, all associations recognize that the field of the independent performing arts extends beyond their membership, which is why they strive to reach out to non-members in their offerings and communications as well. This inclusive approach is crucial to justify and maintain their

political position and thus to fulfill the task of representing the field. Furthermore, the interest in communication is assumed to be mutual. The associations, as a link between the independent community and politics, consistently provide up-to-date information on political decisions and measures that affect all those working in the field. Especially at the time of the survey, when new aid and coronavirus-related funding programs were approved, a wide reach beyond the associations' membership was expected. To achieve the broadest possible coverage with this survey, all member associations shared the link to the online questionnaire through available channels and additionally asked study participants to share it more widely within the community to best reflect existing networks.

The response rates vary across countries. This is also, but likely not exclusively, due to differences in size of national populations in the independent performing arts fields. Other factors could include the communication and networking behavior of the associations themselves. In the interest of transparency, the following tables show the distribution of the sample in terms of individual and organizational participation, the different professional groups, and the types of organizations that participated for each country.

Fig. 1: Proportion (%) of independent performing arts individual agents and organizations, by country.

Country	n	Individual agents	Organizations
Austria	140	83%	17%
Bulgaria	79	57%	43%
Czech Republic	55	35%	66%
Finland	27	74%	26%
Germany	177	81%	19%
Hungary	68	44%	56%
Iceland	112	75%	25%
Italy	147	47%	53%
Romania	48	77%	23%
Slovenia	25	60%	40%
Sweden	70	31%	69%
Switzerland	51	80%	20%
Other	32	72%	28%
Total	1,031	65%	36%

Fig. 2: Proportion (%) of occupational groups represented in the sample, by country.

Country	n (individual agents)	Working in artistic capacity (i.e. as artist, curator, designer, dramaturg)	Working in producing capacity (i.e. as producer, art manager, technician)	Other professions
Austria	116	66%	17%	17%
Bulgaria	45	60%	26%	14%
Czech Republic	19	54%	28%	19%
Finland	20	69%	16%	16%
Germany	144	67%	19%	14%
Hungary	30	46%	44%	10%
Iceland	84	69%	22%	9%
Italy	69	57%	31%	12%
Romania	37	74%	16%	10%
Slovenia	15	47%	34%	19%
Sweden	22	72%	13%	16%
Switzerland	41	49%	36%	15%
Other	23	53%	19%	19%
Total	665	62%	24%	14%

Fig. 3: Proportion (%) of organization types represented in the sample, by country.

Country	n (organizations)	Artist group (i.e. company, collective, ensemble)	Presenting platform (i.e. venue, production house or festival)	Producing platform (i.e. rehearsal space or residence space)	Other organization
Austria	24	51%	34%	14%	0%
Bulgaria	34	59%	28%	10%	4%
Czech Republic	36	34%	38%	24%	4%
Finland	7	40%	31%	20%	10%
Germany	33	49%	31%	8%	13%
Hungary	38	58%	29%	8%	4%
Iceland	28	55%	33%	10%	3%
Italy	78	41%	35%	16%	8%
Romania	11	50%	28%	17%	6%
Slovenia	10	25%	50%	18%	7%
Sweden	48	63%	23%	12%	3%
Switzerland	10	53%	27%	20%	0%
Other	9	100%	0%	0%	0%
Total	366	48%	32%	14%	5%

Through EAIPA, neither the independent performing arts communities of all 27 EU member states, nor those of the 47 countries of continental Europe could be reached. Yet, with the twelve countries studied, each European region is represented more than once. Moreover, the represented countries are linked by EAIPA, they have comparable structures and they could be reached through the European umbrella associations national member associations, which was the main criterion for their inclusion. Different types of performing arts that could not be reached, but cannot remain unmentioned, when considering a European comparison, exist i.e. in the Netherlands, Belgium, Great Britain and France. In the Benelux countries, the city and state theater has never prevailed. Here, a project-based mode of production has been the dominant form since World War II. The theater system in Great Britain receives very little public support and much is financed by means of private funding, which is why there can be no talk of a cultural policy consolidation by agents of any independent community. The same is true for France, where reform was initiated more by the central state than by the artistic community (Fülle 2016). Also, many other European countries cannot be included in this report due to inaccessibility or lack of comparability.

Consequently, the type of representation on which this account is based makes no claim to complete coverage, yet it is very possible to identify regional differences and similarities as well as the continental situation at large. The sample is spread across Europe, allowing for a regional geographic indication. In addition, a large and – considering the professions and types of organizations – well-distributed sample of agents and organizations was reached in each country, allowing for empirically sound indications. Furthermore, the quantitative survey data was triangulated with the data from the qualitative expert interviews and it was reflected in a discussion with representatives of EAIPA member associations on June 17, 2021, at their General Assembly in Prague, which confirmed the results as well. And yet, this sample is not a random statistical one, nor is the population known. Therefore, descriptive analyses are presented that provide directional markers, theses and theoretical

approaches concerning the population of independent performing arts in Europe must be open to further investigation.

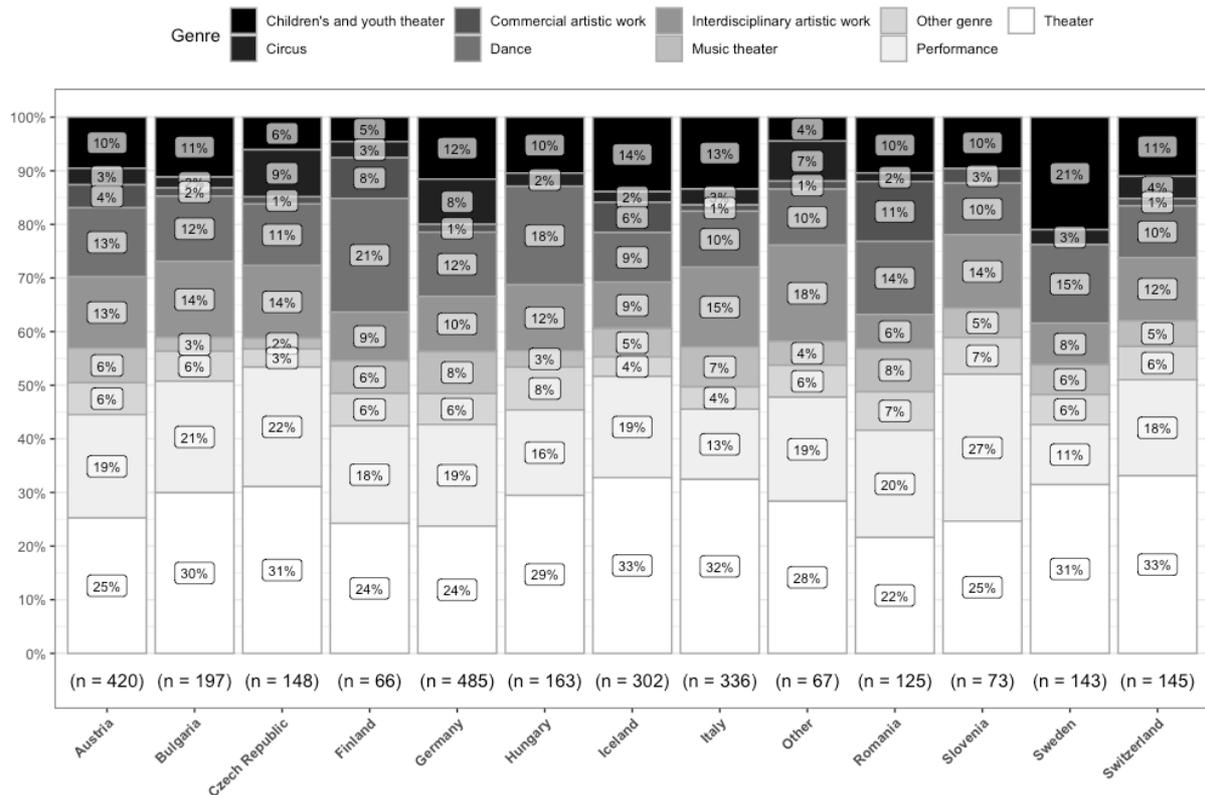
Consolidation of a European Organizational Field

The analysis of the collected core data reveals that the agents in the independent performing arts field in all countries under study are in large part female (61.4%) and rather young with an average age of close to 40 ($M = 39.6$, $SD = 10.6$) as well as very well educated. 72.4% of the respondents have a university degree. A look at further structural characteristics reveals that 76.9% of them work in large cities (over 100,000 inhabitants) and only 5.95% in rural areas. Thus, the data confirms the assumption formulated in literature, e.g. by Brauneck, that the independent performing arts in Europe are primarily a phenomenon in the cultural life of larger cities (Brauneck 2016:16). In analyzing the structure of the field, the agents' self-identification with genres reveals much as well. It is the overlapping of different traditions, zones of meaning, vocabularies and interests that initiate new processes of negotiation in the field's search for cultural policy agreement. In theater studies, the genre-specific consideration is a common means of describing the field (Balme 2021a). Accordingly, the term "independent performing arts" is a structure-related generic one under whose umbrella a multitude of forms and central ideas come together. How these are distributed was asked of the study participants with the help of a given genre classification in multiple selection between dance, spoken theater, performance, music theater, children's and youth theater, circus, inter- and/or transdisciplinary artistic work, commercial theater and others.

A central observation is that no more than one third of all respondents identify with one genre only, while the vast majority (69.3%) identify with two or more. These genre overlaps indicate that the exchange between them allows new approaches to emerge and inspires the innovative power often attributed to the independent community. Looking at the distribution of the individual genres, it becomes evident that theater (28.26%) plays the most significant role, followed by performance (18.2%), dance (12.19%), interdisciplinary work (11.78%), children's and youth theater (11.37%), musical theater (5.28%), circus (4.14%) and commercial theater (2.80%) for the participants of the survey. Despite minor differences, the distribution across countries is largely homogeneous and the proposed genre terms are widely used in practice. The term commercial theater, however, is an exception, which in most countries has very little representation. More than 5%, interestingly, chose the free text field "Other". Proof that the given choices do not sufficiently describe the genres in the field. The evaluation of that data demonstrates that agents also identify with puppet theater, installation theater, storytelling, improvisational

theater, online theater, technological theater or urban games in addition to the aforementioned.

Fig. 4: Proportion (%) of genres that independent performing arts individual agents and organizations identify with across countries.



The count refers to the number of mentions. Individual respondents may have mentioned more than one genre.

These genres are governed, interpreted and kept alive by the organizations and agents in the field, which raises the question: what are typical organizations in the independent performing arts and how do they organize the links between these different zones of meaning? At first sight, a theoretically derived concept of organization seems difficult to reconcile with the unbound way of working in the independent performing arts community. Communication in an organization is specific: it consolidates structures and processes (March and Simon 1993) and, in contrast to other areas of social life, rarely seems independent and self-determined. Thus, one can "Organisation als Ort des Zwangs kritisieren und die Gesellschaft als Ort der Freiheit preisen oder umgekehrt die Organisation als Ort der Planung loben und die Gesellschaft als Ort der Anarchie beklagen" (Baecker 2015:32). In either case, organizations shape reality consciously, according to

planning and repetitive as well as tested patterns. How these patterns may look in a field that is continuously renewing itself while rejecting "tradition" will be described below.

Across countries, 80.39% of the respondents that spoke for organizations work on a non-profit basis. In Slovenia and Switzerland, it is even 100%. As NPOs, they demonstrate their claim to independence from the market and politics in a virtually performative manner. The overall European picture shows a type of organization that legitimizes itself through content rather than profit. Furthermore, 48.43% of all organizations surveyed are art-producing groups and 5.42% are venues with their own ensemble, which also produce themselves but at a fixed location. The remainder are festivals (11.36%), production houses (9.79%), residencies (7.34%), rehearsal spaces (6.82%) or venues without an ensemble (5.42%), which provide the framework for the independent production of art by those artists and companies. Consequently, the field can be described as dominated by artists who make use of existing infrastructure in order to bring their own content to an audience. They offer projects that are typically not funded by the framing infrastructure, but by independent funding bodies. Abstracting from this initial condition, it is likely that the artists themselves determine the form and thematic focus of their work, rather than being commissioned to do so by the presenting organizations. The latter, in turn, can only realize their content profile if they engage with the artists' content offers. This leads to the hypotheses of a reciprocal conditionality that requires cooperation and gives rise to constantly changing network structures. Such an organization makes it possible to react flexibly to new situations and thus to manage the interfaces between the individual zones of meaning of different genres, traditions and ideas.

A look at the individual agent level shows that the majority of the respondents work in artistic production (artists 48.3%, production managers 13.89%, dramaturgs 6.81%). Only a small part is in management (art/cultural managers 7.28% and curators 4.06%). Technicians (2.36%), set and costume designers (3.4%) are scarcely represented. Again, this reflects that the field centers around the artist rather than the organization, as discovered in the analysis above. The agents interviewed work predominantly as freelancers (63.61%); in addition, 23.16% are in hybrid employment, 8.42% are employed full-time, and 4.81% are employed part-time. In this form of employment, the word "independent" takes on meaning as part of the name-giving "independent performing arts". The field centers around a form of work that is free from directives and it is expected that this fact corresponds to a claims of eye-level between artists and organizations and a desire for independence and self-determination that prevails in the field. However, this freedom requires the acceptance of considerable personal and entrepreneurial risks and the lack of protection under labor law. That, however, is not the only vulnerability in the

field's organization. It is particularly striking that more than one third of all study participants identify with two or more professions (see Fig. 4).

Fig. 5: Proportion (%) of independent performing arts professionals who identify with multiple professions simultaneously.

	n	Percent
Identification with one profession	413	62.20%
Identification with two professions	146	22.00%
Identification with three or more professions	106	15.81%

For example, a large proportion of artists also see themselves as producers. A finding that allows for the interpretation that individual agents seek to realize their productions at any price and to compensate for the lack of management by exploiting their own labor. However, this is only an example that illustrates an entanglement of field structure and working conditions; a detailed examination of working conditions will follow later in this report.

Summarizing the previous discussion, the modes of characteristic manifestations archetypically portray the field as follows: The independent performing arts in Europe are primarily produced by freelance, rather young and well-educated artists or groups of artists, who work independently of the state and the market as creative innovators and who take high risks to do so. Regarding demographics, as well as the urban-rural spread, distribution of genres, types of organization and professional status, there is a structural similarity between countries. Even if there are isolated regional differences, the independent performing arts are in a process of isomorphic field consolidation and are converging throughout Europe.

To measure the degree of this structuring process, a deductive approach was taken and the concept to be measured was derived from theory. DiMaggio and Powell's theory on institutional isomorphism and collective rationality in organizational fields thereby indicates how this may be measured in order to obtain empirical results (DiMaggio 1982; DiMaggio and Powell 1983). The extent to which the independent performing arts structure themselves institutionally can be understood by applying the following indicators:

“The process of institutional definition, or “structuration,” consists of four parts: an increase in the extent of interaction among organizations in the field; the emergence of sharply defined interorganizational structures of domination and patterns of coalition; an increase in the information load with which organizations in a field must contend; and the development of a mutual awareness among

participants in a set of organizations that they are involved in a common enterprise” (DiMaggio and Powell 1983).

These structuring indicators were translated into items measured by means of the Likert scale. The ideal Likert scale development process, which starts with a pool of 100 items, was pragmatically shortened. The indicators were translated into 23 items during operationalization before being shortened to 6 statements during pretesting. The self-report statements were answered on a 5-point rating scale ranging from 1 ("strongly disagree") to 5 ("strongly agree") and provide the following results: the average score for the “structuration” index is 3.93 and its indicators thus receive broad support. In country comparisons, there are only small deviations, with mean values ranging from a minimum of 3.82 in Iceland to a maximum of 4.14 in Finland. Consequently, a high degree of structuration must be assumed. The independent performing arts can accordingly be described as a Europe-wide organizational field with similarly pronounced structural features and a high institutional character. Yet, is this also reflected in the socioeconomic situation of independent performing arts professionals?

Social Status Between Low Income, a Lack of Security and Inadequate Working Conditions

Using a mixed methods approach, research on the socioeconomic situation of artists and cultural workers in the field is conducted inductively. First, assessments by experts are synthesized according to the model of summarizing qualitative content analysis (Mayring 2015), before these findings are contrasted with the quantitative results. The material used for this are free text responses to the following instruction:

Please describe the independent performing arts and the state of related infrastructure in your country.

The instruction was part of a semi-structured interview questionnaire filled out online and distributed by EAIPA to the experts of its member associations. Through the questionnaires, the association representatives were encouraged to report on the specificities of the communities they represent, as well as their needs and problems. The analysis revealed the following:

Association representatives describe the independent performing arts in Europe as a field of work characterized by low and often insufficient funds for production and infrastructure. Associated with these problems, questionable working conditions are highlighted: a high workload, great insecurity, low incomes and a lack of resources.

In addition, in many places a lack of continuous maintenance and development of infrastructures is described, as well as a lack of public funding, missing premises, little long-term employment relationships, inadequately trained production and administrative staff, insufficient social security as well as a lack of further training opportunities and advice. The representatives of the associations further criticize that artists often work in improvised and inadequately equipped spaces, that in some cases the community suffers from insufficient public recognition, that the artistic, financial and administrative responsibility and thus the full risk usually lies with the artists, that legislation regulating the public funding of the field exists only in some places, and that where it does exist, it is often unbalanced or insufficient. In some instances, moreover, the independence of the field is questioned because funding commitments are tied directly to a political agenda. Across the board, associations report poor pension prospects, and where there are special pension programs for artists, they apply only to a few respected artists and even then are often ineffective.

Within the scope of this article, it is not possible to address all of these shortcomings in greater detail. However, some overarching concepts emerge as central. In the following, the income situation, the lack of social security, as well as the working conditions are explored against the backdrop of quantitative data in a European comparison.

Income

The study participants were asked about their personal annual net income, i.e., the sum of all types of income they actually dispose of in the course of a year (net income from wages and salaries plus income from self-employment, investment income, pensions, alimony, unemployment benefits, etc.). Whereas more weight can be assigned to the figures from Austria, Switzerland, Iceland, Germany, Italy, Bulgaria and Romania with $n > 30$, those from Sweden, Finland, Slovenia, the Czech Republic and Hungary with $n < 30$ are only indicators with little statistical reliability. And yet, the median value of these income measures gives a data-based idea of the situation. Since different European countries have different income levels, the median value alone says little about wealth or poverty. As a reference, the at-risk-of-poverty threshold at 60% of the respective national median equivalized disposable incomes are considered (eurostat 2021). In Austria and Sweden, the median income of the study participants is below the at-risk-of-poverty threshold, meaning that more than half of the respondents in these countries are at risk of poverty. In Switzerland, Iceland, Germany, Italy and Finland, the median income of the participants is only slightly above the respective thresholds. There, a minimum of 40% of the surveyed

professionals have an income that falls below the at-risk-of-poverty threshold. It is particularly striking that in Slovenia, the Czech Republic, Bulgaria, Hungary and Romania, and thus in all the post-socialist countries covered by the study, a considerable but much smaller proportion of artists have incomes below the threshold than elsewhere. Furthermore, when comparing the distribution between men and women, in most countries the proportion of women whose income is below the at-risk-of-poverty threshold is significantly higher than that of men. However, a high risk of poverty is the case across all countries, genders and professions in the field.

Figure 6: Income and poverty risk in the independent performing arts in Europe in 2019.

Country	n	Median income of respondents	At-risk-of-poverty threshold in the country	Respondents at risk of poverty in %	Female respondents at risk of poverty in %	Male respondents at risk of poverty in %
Austria	110	13,000 €	14,212 €	62,7	64.9	56.2
Germany	138	15,900 €	14,109 €	43.5	48.2	34.6
Bulgaria	39	5,113 €	2,534 €	15.4	22.7	5.9
Italy	65	10,500 €	10,299 €	41.5	51.4	25.9
Iceland	69	26,080 €	23,951 €	44.9	41.9	50
Switzerland	39	26,081 €	24,755 €	46.2	42.9	50
Romania	32	5,502 €	2,310 €	9.4	14.3	5.6
Hungary	28	8,190 €	3,511 €	10.7	12.5	8.3
Slovenia	15	16,244 €	8,440 €	33.3	25	50
Sweden	20	14,326 €	14,684 €	50	64.3	16.7
Finland	20	15,000 €	14,927 €	40	50	16.7
Czech Republic	18	14,005 €	5,997 €	27,8	30	25

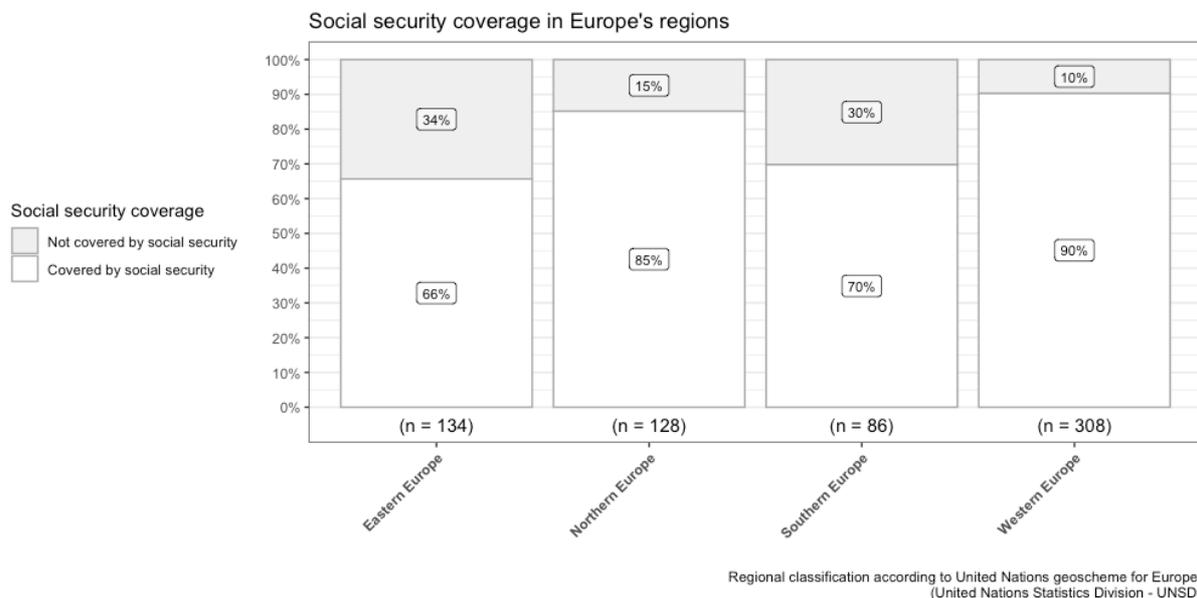
The individual net income described above can originate from a wide variety of sources. It is not the income generated by the art-producing activity alone. What part of the income comes from other activities was queried in a further step. These include activities that have no connection to the arts, but also related activities such as theater pedagogy or teaching. Only 22.68% claim that they do not receive any income from another activity. 47.64% report that they receive up to fifty percent and 27.25% more than half of their income from another activity. 2.44% even state that all of their income comes from an activity outside the producing performing arts. Consequently, just under a quarter of all respondents are able to live fully from their own artistic activity.

Social Security

In addition to low income, the lack of protection against social contingencies such as old age, illness or unemployment is a criterion for precarious work (Keller and Seifert 2013). The field is dominated by freelance work and thus a form of employment for which social security has to be provided individually. Even if in some countries special measures are taken to address the particularly vulnerable position of performing arts professionals, as a freelancer there is no legal obligation to pay into the pension or unemployment provision.

The loss of earnings in the event of illness or vacation is not compensated, disability and incapacity to work are not covered. Bridging periods in which no projects are implemented, development and acquisition work in which efforts are made to find new projects, or sudden idle times caused, e.g. by cancellations or the postponement of events, are not financed. In freelance work, these risks are usually addressed through reserves from profit surplus, which, given the low incomes, is likely to be extremely difficult to realize for the vast majority of professionals in the field. Despite these circumstances, a high willingness to take risks and a high degree of personal responsibility are required, while little social protection is offered. The high number of individual agents who do not benefit from social security protection (see Fig. 7) suggests that, in many cases, social security contributions are understood as a burden, not as an investment, and are frequently circumvented accordingly. In all of the countries studied, there are agents who, by their own account, do not benefit from social security protection. On average, across countries, those are 18% of the respondents, with the problem being more serious in Eastern and Southern Europe than in Northern and Western Europe.

Fig. 7: Proportion (%) of individual agents who report not being covered by any social security system.



To counter this risk, subsidized social security systems developed specifically for the arts exist in some cases. In Germany and Slovenia, these reach a comparatively large proportion of the respondents, just under 50% in each country. Austria (28%) and Finland (10%) provide them as well, although only a small percentage of the study participants make use of them. In the Czech Republic, Hungary, Sweden, Bulgaria, Romania, Italy and Switzerland, this type of support does not exist. A complete comparative analysis of the

social security systems would have to take a closer look at different professional groups and national characteristics and would require much more detail than is possible at this point. Nevertheless, the data collected offer a first impression and make it evident that accessibility to social security for freelance performing arts professionals is a serious problem, especially in Eastern and Southern Europe, that in many places the special position of freelancers in the arts is not reflected in social security systems and that where it is, not all professionals in the field benefit from it. These results, coupled with the income data, attest to precarious conditions in the field and highlight the urgent need for action.

Working Conditions

To obtain a deeper understanding of the situation, working conditions are examined in the following. A specific index, which summarizes income adequacy and sufficiency, job security, self- or over-exploitation and the perceived meaningfulness of work, provides information on the matter. The Good Work Index (Gute Arbeit Index) developed by the DGB (German Trade Union Confederation) (Holler 2013), in conjunction with Klaus Dörre's reflections on the concept of precarity (Dörre 2014) and Jeanette Moosbrugger's notion of self-exploitation (Moosbrugger 2012), provide the theoretical framework. Within the operationalization, the ideal Likert scale development process, which starts with a pool of 100 items, was again pragmatically shortened. The indicators were translated into 9 items and answered on a 5-point rating scale from 1 "strongly disagree" to 5 "strongly agree". The mean score of the Likert scale "working conditions" is 2.75. The country score is min. 2.62 in Bulgaria and max. 2.91 in Slovenia. Thus, the respondents perceive the working conditions across borders as rather inadequate. The "adequacy and sufficiency of income" was rated negatively overall with an average score of 2.33. The same applies to "job security" (2.2) describing an unstable, financially insecure work situation, with little prospect in terms of retirement. On the other hand, the issue of "over-exploitation" is more generally approved, with a mean score of 3.6. Predominantly, the idea that working unpaid extra hours is necessary to achieve professional goals and that continuous new demands are an opportunity rather than a burden is met with approval. Regarding the "meaningfulness of work" (4.39), an exceedingly high value is achieved. For artists in the independent performing arts in Europe, it is of the utmost importance to pursue exactly their profession and they fully believe that their work is meaningful and that they can realize their values in it. These findings reveal a tension. On the one hand, there is a high sense of meaning; on the other, there is great insecurity, insufficient income that is perceived as not commensurate with performance and overexploitation of labor. Accordingly, it must be argued that the meaningfulness of the work leads to high motivation, which favors acceptance of the precarious situation.

In summary, the independent performing arts represent an exceptionally precarious working environment, with low incomes, inadequate social security and a high proportion of agents at risk of poverty, especially in the north, west and south of Europe. Less than a quarter of the respondents can live exclusively from artistic work, despite their high educational level. All the others depend on a second source of income to make a living. In addition, there are always artists who fall completely through the cracks of the social security systems, especially in Southern and Eastern Europe. Less than half of the countries surveyed have a social security system that takes into account the vulnerable situation of artists, and where such a system exists, not all benefit from it. In spite of these shortcomings, most of the agents consider the field as a place of work that is meaningful and where one's own values can be realized. It is precisely this perception that compensates for the high level of difficulties. The inner drive to do something meaningful belies the grievances. That is why a further reappraisal of this relationship is of the utmost urgency.

Social and Economic Consequences Associated with the Coronavirus Pandemic

The study participants were requested to report their net annual income in 2019 as well as that of 2020. The income of the participating independent performing arts professionals in Europe has deteriorated with a mean value of differences of € 3,150.20 between the years, and this despite the fact that 58.7% of all study participants in report having received coronavirus-specific government support. The overall decrease in income between years is 18.82%. The table below shows the figures for each country.

Figure 8: Incoming difference between 2019 and 2020 attributable to the coronavirus pandemic.

Country	n	Average income in 2019	Income difference 2019 - 2020	Decline in income in %
Austria	110	15,371.81 €	-2,037.73 €	13.26
Germany	138	17,283.63 €	-4,367.22 €	25.27
Bulgaria	39	6,541.77 €	-1,543.64 €	23.6
Italy	65	14,185.38 €	-2,113.03 €	14.9
Iceland	69	26,180.16 €	-2,938.59 €	11.22
Switzerland	39	29,473.67 €	-7,591.08 €	25.76
Romania	32	8,559.72 €	-3,583.18 €	41.86
Hungary	28	8,811.36 €	-2,625.43 €	29.8
Slovenia	15	18,070.47 €	-3,611.47 €	19.99
Sweden	20	17,971.30 €	-3,647.15 €	20.29
Finland	20	18,752.20 €	-294.50 €	1.57
Czech Republic	18	14,402.44 €	-2,639.33 €	18.33

In addition, a decline in the commissioning situation could be recorded. While the surveyed freelance agents worked for a median of four to six organizations in 2019, this value dropped to one to three organizations in 2020. The number of ongoing employment contracts held by organizations in the field declined as well. Overall, the percentage of full-time contracts signed by participating organizations is significantly lower in 2020 than in 2019, with a median difference of 0.12 points on a five-point scale, or 2.7%. Considering the regions in detail, it can be determined that there was no significant decrease in full-time contracts in Eastern and Western Europe, while the decrease was 3% in Southern Europe and 6.8% in Northern Europe. The share of fee-based contracts is also significantly lower in 2020 than in 2019, with a mean difference of 0.38 points on a five-point scale. This represents an overall decline of 7.5% across countries. When examining the regions in detail, it is found that there was no significant decrease in fee contracts in Southern Europe, while the decrease was 7.2% in Western Europe, 8.4% in Eastern Europe and 11.6% in Northern Europe.

67.9% of all individuals surveyed perceive the coronavirus pandemic as a threat to their professional livelihood and, when the decline in income, contracting and employment is considered against the backdrop of the pandemic, they have every reason to do so. There has been a marked deterioration between the years. The pandemic highlights the problems of previous livelihood models and intensifies the already threatening situation. In light of the pandemic, the fragility of the agents' working and living situations becomes clear. Consequently, the risk of long-term damage to the field is prevalent, as it cannot offer secure prospects and as it is not unlikely that agents will have to change professions due to incalculable risk.

Responses from Political Advocacy Groups

The solution-seeking process for these problems is being driven by the participation of advocacy groups in governance processes. Using summary qualitative content analysis of the expert interviews, strategies and action in the area of political participation will subsequently be presented. Thereafter an assessment of these processes is brought forward in order to derive potential for improvement. The material used for the qualitative content analysis are free text answers of the association representatives to the following instruction:

Please describe three cultural policy changes to which your association has contributed and which have had a positive impact on the independent performing arts in your country.

Mayring's summary qualitative content analysis (Mayring 2015) reveals the following policies, measures, and successes:

Association representatives describe creating solidarity-based forms of networking at the local, national and international levels and coordinating common positions on specific issues as the basis for their work in governance, as well as increasing the field's public and political visibility and creating regular opportunities for conversations, both in private and in public, with government officials and administrators. In addition, participating in committees and performing tasks for cultural administrators are a means of achieving socioeconomic improvement. As concrete achievements, they describe ongoing constructive dialogue with administrations and governments and collaborative development of policies and legislation, the co-design of coronavirus aid programs and other funding tools, participation in restructuring processes of subsidy systems, creating new access to existing funding instruments, lobbying for and participating in the creation of new venues, introducing guidelines and minimum fees, participating in processes that lead to increases in cultural budgets, improving transparency in the allocation of funding, improving professionalization opportunities for agents and improving access to social security systems for arts professionals in some countries.

It appears that these achievements are isolated instances and that the possibility of participatory governance is less prevalent in some countries than in others.

Representatives from Hungary and Slovenia report that their governments are not interested in cooperating with the associations and even actively work against them, and that therefore means of protest (demonstrations, public statements, petitions, etc.) are resorted to in an attempt to gain new political recognition.

Cultural governance and thus the interaction of the state and civil society in regulating collective issues in the common interest (Mayntz 2004:68), is foreseen as a political method at the EU level. In 2012, the Council of the European Union decided to recognize that "cultural governance should be understood as a method for implementing cultural policy as well as a tool for anchoring culture more deeply in the political agenda" (Rat der Europäischen Union 2012:1). In this context, the EU asks all member states to promote good cultural governance within their respective competences. The extent to which this claim is applied to the independent performing arts field will be reviewed below. In order to be able to assess the success of participatory governance comparatively, the OECD model of government-citizen relations is consulted. According to this model, the influence

on policy-making grows with increasing communication between civil society agents and governments. The lowest level of communication is reached when governments share information about policies that affect them. The next highest level is reached when governments enter into active dialogue and consult with civil society agents about policies. The governance process is most successful when agents have the opportunity to actively contribute to the development of policies that affect them (Gramberger 2001).

In the independent performing arts, the state is not universally perceived as providing sufficient information. With a value of 2.74 on a 5-point rating scale, the topic receives rather little approval overall. The value is lower in the south (2.41) and east (2.65) of Europe than in the west (2.9) and north (2.97). The "consultation and dialogue" indicator was asked about in various items and summarized into one scale. With an average value of 2.81, the agreement of the respondents is also lacking here. The majority of the agents feel not included much in communication about the political measures or reforms that affect them. In Hungary (1.82), the government's willingness to engage in dialogue with the performing arts community is clearly denied, while in Italy (2.4) and Romania (2.61) it is rated as rather low. Here, too, the values in the south (2.45) and east (2.58) are lower than in the those in the north (2.96) and west (3.05).

A further scale is used to summarize the possibility of the agents' participation in policymaking. As with the other two indicators, this is perceived as rather low overall (2.66). Also, participation is less present in the south (2.36) and east (2.43) than in the north (2.85) and west (2.87) of Europe. The fact that respondents in the north and west feel better informed and consider governments to be more transparent than in the south and east is indicated by association representatives as well as by survey participants. Among the experts, a similar distinction between regions is found for the indicators "consultation and dialogue" and "active participation in policy-making". According to the association representatives, the governments in Italy, Hungary and Slovenia rarely ask for feedback from experts. When looking at the evaluation of the possibility for participation, it is noticeable that this is also completely negated by the Italian association representatives and negatively evaluated by those from Hungary, Slovenia and Sweden. In the case of Sweden, the assessment of the performing arts community contradicts the assessment of the experts. Artists perceive the Swedish government as more willing to engage in governance, while the association representatives, who represent the community's influence on politics, do not confirm this openness. In Austria, the Czech Republic, Finland, Germany, Iceland and Switzerland, however, the experts report dialogue. In Germany and Austria, there is even talk of co-determination and partnership relationships with political decision-makers, and there is much opportunity for co-design. This wide range of impact

scopes shows that the ongoing efforts to work with governments result in varying degrees of success.

However, proposals and best practices for improving the socioeconomic situation are continuously generated throughout all associations. In order to exert their influence, they rely on solidarity-based forms of networking within the performing arts communities and in consequence on a coordinated approach to politics. This is based on common positions on specific issues and on creating regular opportunities for discussion that lead to exchange and constructive dialogue with government officials. Although these efforts are found in all countries under study, there are differences in the willingness of policymakers to engage. Unsurprisingly, the experts rate the distribution of information by governments better than the community does, and the same is true for the willingness to engage in dialogue. As an advocate, the associations are the link between performing arts communities and politicians and are thus more involved in these processes. Despite the willingness to engage in dialogue in some parts of Europe, only the associations in Austria and Germany agree unreservedly that political participation is successful. Furthermore, the data suggests that in the countries of Northern and Western Europe, communication between governments and the independent performing arts communities, as well as the possibility of political co-determination, is more pronounced than in the south and east of the continent.

Concluding Remarks

The institutionalization process of the independent performing arts in Europe is advanced. In many European countries, they guarantee reliability in the form of reproducible structures and expectable outcomes based on rules and principles. The independent performing arts have established themselves as an organizational field in each of the countries studied. They present independent structures, forms of organization and cooperation that exist autonomously from state and commercial theater systems. Even if the recognition of this autonomy on the part of politicians is by no means self-evident throughout the continent, it is indeed a prerequisite for cultural governance and thus for cooperation between the state and the performing arts community in order to regulate existing problems in the common interest. Against the background of the prevailing risk of poverty, the lack of social security in many places, the high workload and the overexploitation of labor, inclusive cultural governance that takes account of best practice and international developments is of utmost urgency. The precarious labor situation in the field characterizes a socioeconomic context that offers great challenges in all parts of Europe, especially after the coronavirus pandemic continuously exacerbates the existing

problems. The medium- and long-term effects of the crisis are not yet foreseeable, but the predicament is threatening. The current dynamic situation requires continuous scientific analyses of the social and economic developments and their incorporation into political decision-making processes. Best practices that can serve as inspiration for new governmental measures to improve the situation have been tried and tested in individual countries. The continuous and intensive international exchange between cultural politicians, administrators, associations and artists about possible solutions to the escalating problems created by the crises, is necessary in order to profit from tried and proven governance models which can help to protect the field and its agents from further damage.

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Appendix 1

List of associations through which the survey was distributed and whose representatives were interviewed.

AUSTRIA	Interessengemeinschaft Freie Theaterarbeit (IGFT) / Austrian Association of Independent Theaters
BULGARIA	ACT – Асоциация за свободен театър / ACT – Association of Independent Performing Arts
CZECH REPUBLIC	Asociace nezávislých divadel ČR / Czech Association of Independent Theater
FINLAND	Teatterikeskus / Theater Center Finland
GERMANY	Bundesverband Freie Darstellende Künste / German Association of the Independent Performing Arts
HUNGARY	Független Előadó-művészeti Szövetség (FESZ) / Association of Independent Performing Arts
ICELAND	Association of Independent Theaters in Iceland (AITI) / Association of Independent Theaters in Iceland
ITALY	Associazione Etre & Coordinamento della Realtà della Scena Contemporanea
ROMANIA	Asociatia Teatrelor Independente / The Association of Independent Theaters
SLOVENIA	Društvo Asociacija / Association Asociacija
SWEDEN	Teatercentrum / Theater Center Sweden & Danscentrum Sverige / Dance Center Sweden
SWITZERLAND	t. Theaterschaffende Schweiz / Professionnels du spectacle Suisse / Professionisti dello Spettacolo Svizzera

Working Papers

The working papers "Institutional Transformations in the Performing Arts" provide a theoretical as well as empirical examination of the research unit's range of topics. They thus enable a discussion of theoretical concepts, the presentation of ongoing empirical research and a summary of preliminary results. The goal of the short contributions is to present, critically examine and further develop theoretical concepts. The working papers, then, should not be understood as conclusive theoretical contributions, but rather as an invitation to exchange conceptual positions and empirical results.

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