**Equality, Diversity, Inclusion and Human Rights in Times of Austerity**

**Stream 16:** Economic crisis and austerity the risks on human and social rights at work

**Abstract Submission**

**Inequalities in Art and Culture: Artistic Labour in the UK during the Recent Economic Crisis**

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The recent Culture White Paper of the Department for Culture, Media and Sport published in March 2016 provides the vision of cultural policy in the UK, which revolves around the themes of diversity in terms of employment and audience participation. This report is largely received as a response to the increasing pressures within the creative industries regarding inequalities in terms of gender (around 38% of total employees are women), BAME (Black, Asian and Middle East) employees and the high education background required for the majority of Creative Economy jobs. Nevertheless, a more careful investigation within each of these industries reveals a different story in terms of gender inequalities which vary significantly across the creative industries, while the only persistent source of inequality is the high level of education required for jobs in the creative industries (Tables 1 & 2; DCMS, 2015).

***Tables 1 & 2***

Diverse findings regarding employment and consumption/audience participation across the creative industries requires to zoom in specific ‘industries’ or fields in order to understand inequalities better. For this reason, this research focuses on the field of visual arts, including roles such as artists, art dealers, curators, and conservators, as well as managerial roles that support the operations of galleries, auction houses and museums. The aim of this paper is to investigate the employment conditions of art graduates within the recent economic crisis in the UK (Bridgstock & Cunningham, 2016). It is interesting to investigate the field of visual arts, because on the surface it does not seem unequal. Gender representation is almost divided equally across genders, and BAME employment has an increasing tendency (DCMS, 2015, p.15). Only the fact the employees who have a higher educational background verifies a trend that exists across almost all the creative industries (DCMS, 2015, p.15). Do these findings indicate that the field of visual arts provides equal opportunities?

As a form of political discourse, the Culture White Paper (DCMS, 2016) celebrates creativity in the UK as being inclusive while providing opportunities to creatives and communities to participate in the cultural domain. This report, launched by the Conservative party in the UK, is largely considered as a continuation of the neo-liberal cultural policies introduced by the Labour party in 1997 (Hesmondhalgh et al., 2015). The increased privatisation of culture, associated with the reduction of public spending is accompanied by controversies, such as celebrating a multicultural workforce in the creative industries while promoting creative outcomes which are heavily framed as ‘British’ (Dowling & Harvie, 2014; Townsend, 2006).

The political discourse of the ‘Big Society’ initiated by the Conservative Party internalises the conditions of the recent economic crisis (Dowling & Harvie, 2014). Unsurprisingly, Big Society means more privatisation for culture, less public expenditure and free labour in the form of ‘voluntarism’ (Dowling & Harvie, 2014). As Neelands et al. (2015, p.46) highlight “91% of the creative workforce in the UK has worked for free at some point”. This research is focusing on the careers of art graduates in the UK sourcing primary data from a survey which is going to take place in the June 2016. Two focus groups (one with art students and a second with art graduates) will take place in July 2016 in order to reveal the perceived barriers of entering the art labour market and the actual experience of art graduates. In addition, Secondary data regarding employment in the creative industries and the visual arts sector will be sourced from policy reports, including the DCMS and Arts Council UK.

The field of visual arts is influenced by the recent economic crisis in many ways. According to the cultural economist Claire McAndrew (2016), the economic crisis has created more high-net worth individuals with an appetite to spend in high art, luxury brands and other commodities (Table 3). This is also reinforced by an increasing tendency to consider art as an investment, with fine art occupying approximately 20% across investments, such as real estate, stocks and jewellery (Petterson, 2014). The economic crisis being detrimental for organizations and countries, for some domains like the visual arts it seems to support growth (Tables 4, 5 & 6). Nevertheless, it is uncertain whether these conditions are going to support equal opportunities for employment in the artistic field. Instead, the attraction of new wealth in the artistic field creates new forms of inequalities.

***Tables 3, 4, 5 & 6***

Despite the promise of information and communication technologies to provide opportunities to artists globally, geographic inequalities intensify as economic resources concentrate in art hubs like London (Velthuis & Curioni, 2015). However, the need of high-net-worth-individuals to find investment opportunities has led to an increase in real estate prices in places like London. As Nicholas Serota (director of Tate) warns “the high cost of living in London is threatening its place as a world leader in creativity and the arts” (Watts, 2016). This effect pressurises galleries and art institutions to take less risks in their programming patterns, which results into including less emerging artists in major exhibitions.

As art is increasingly seen as investment (Petterson, 2014), high-net-worth-individuals are looking for ‘discovering’ new talent which will produce financial returns in the near future (McAndrew, 2016). Looking at art as an investment creates a ‘culture of gambling’ within the artistic field, which explains why certain art works achieve very high prices, dividing artists into a small cast of super-stars and a vast majority which experiences precarious conditions of labour (Gill & Pratt, 2013; Morgan et al., 2013; Table 7). This also divides the cultural domain into certain forms of art such as contemporary art which is extremely volatile and thus profitable, and others such as performance which due to immateriality are is considered as suitable for investment (Oakley, 2009).

***Table 7***

Art investment in the artistic field is fuelled by vested interest within elite networks of artists, dealers, curators, art advisers, and museum directors, which exploit information asymmetries and eventually benefit from the economic crisis (Velthuis, 2005). In relation to diversity, cultural inequalities do not necessarily concern gender or race, but predominantly class as elite networks tend to reproduce their structure and norms in order to maintain power, while constraining new agents to emerge from the margins. This explains the increased importance of alternative funding sources based on digital technologies, such as crowdfunding, to support projects which do not attract the interest of investors or the establishment.

The economic crisis has led to more austerity in artistic field, resulting into cuttings in public spending towards the arts. As a result, cultural institutions rely more on private sources and sponsorships in order to survive. Neo-liberal policies within museums and high entrance prices explain why only 13% of low socio-economic groups visit museums despite the deliberate effort of art institutions for community enhancement (Hesmondhalgh et al., 2015; Neelands et al., 2015). In addition, a concentration of resources in art institutions like the Tate is observed, which receives around the 60% of public funding for visual arts (Pooke, 2011). Based on a massive scale of operations, Tate engages in new business development, such as the recent expansion plan in order to create a platform that attracts sponsorships and broader audience. Public museums, like the Tate, represent less of a public sphere in which culture is negotiated (Alberro, 2009), and more of neo-liberal vehicles that aim to generate revenues based on entertainment and a ‘culture of spectacle’ (Schubert, 2009).

This research argues that the recent economic crisis has intensified the interest of high net worth individuals for the arts, entangling arts more strongly with the dynamics of commerce. Conspicuous consumption is certainly not a new phenomenon (Veblen, 1899), as high art systematically used to support the bourgeoisie to differentiate its identity from lower social classes (Bourdieu, 1993). This paper exposes the gap between the discourse of cultural policy in the UK which celebrates diversity and the reality of artistic labour. The recent economic crisis has intensified the dominance of the economic field to the artistic field (Bourdieu, 1993), despite the common belief according to which in times of crisis art is liberated from the constraints of power leading the society as a true avant-garde (Cottington, 2013).

Sustainable growth in the artistic field means more opportunities for emerging artists and art graduates in the job market. For this reason, this paper concentrates on the employment conditions for artistic labour within the recent economic crisis. By investigating the role of arts in society and economy, this research argues for a cultural policy that highlights the importance of localities and focuses more on bettering the conditions of artistic labour. Such cultural policy will reveal the intrinsic value of the Arts in terms of supporting continuous education, enhancing creativity of individuals, promoting cultural heritage, and improving well-being of citizens (Heilbrun & Gray, 2001). In other words, having access to culture is a basic human right, and at the same time, participation in cultural life is a way for securing diversity within a democratic society.

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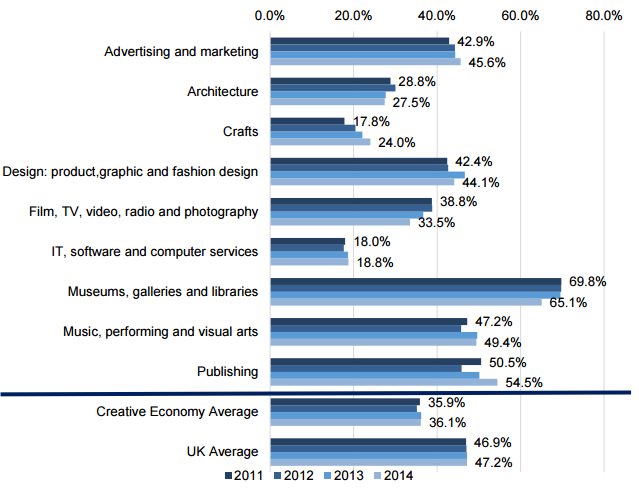
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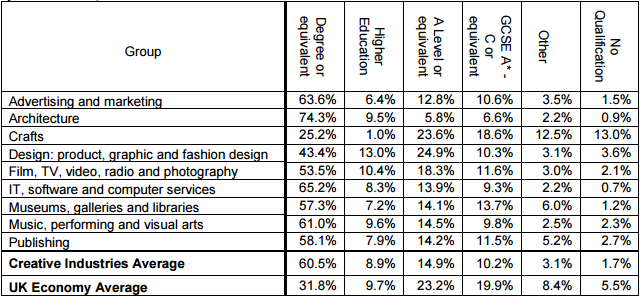
**Tables**

Table 1: Proportion of women working in each Creative Economy group, by year



*Source: DCMS (2015, p.15)*

Table 2: Proportion of jobs in the creative industries, by highest level of qualification, 2014



*Source: DCMS (2015, p.16)*

Table 3: The Total Global Population of High-net-worth-individuals (HNWIs), in millions

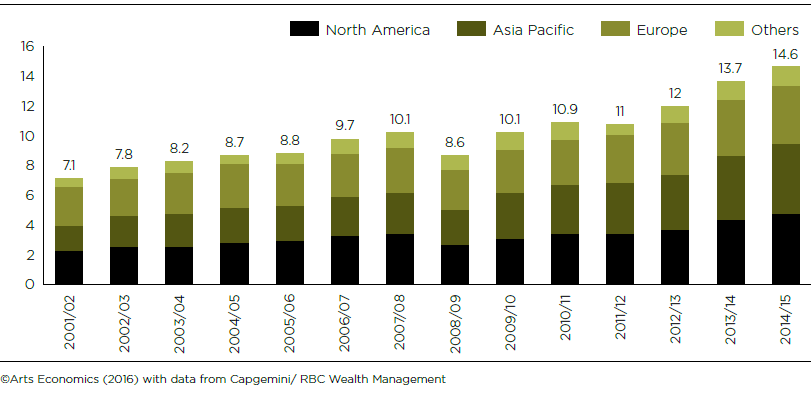


Table 4: Sales in Major Art Market, 2005-2015

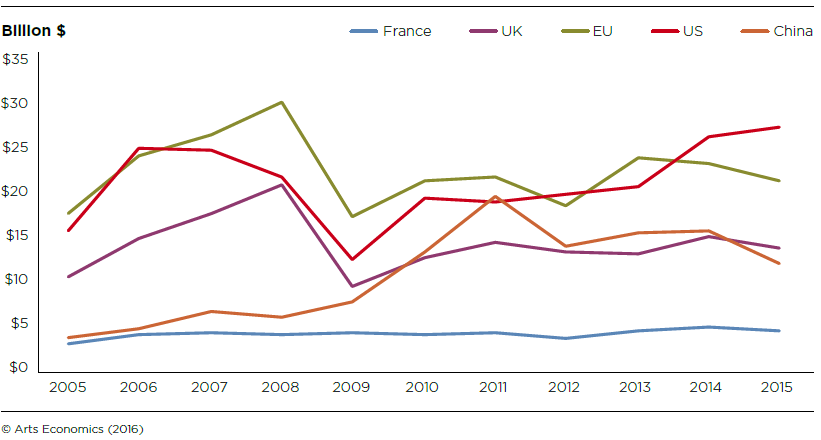


Table 5: Sales in Contemporary Art Market, 2005-2015

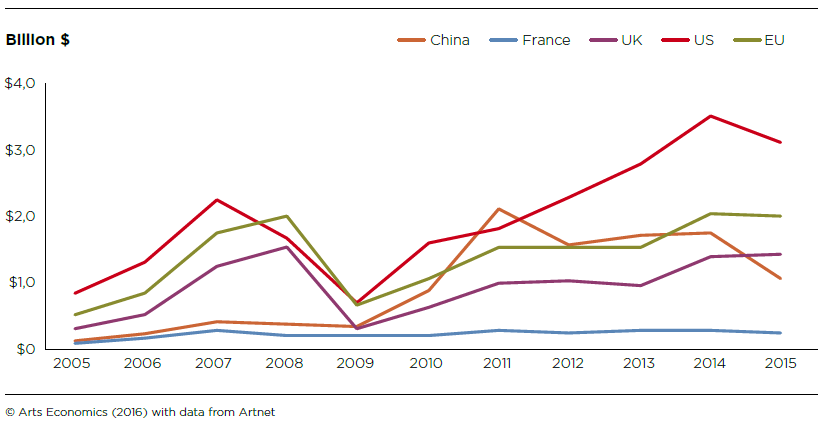


Table 6: Growth of Art Sales by Value of Price Segments, 2005-2015

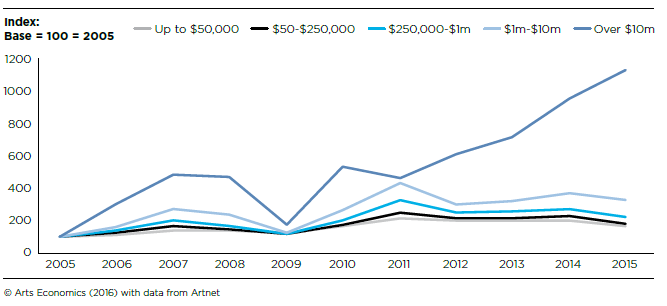


Table 7: Share of the Number of Artists by Price Segment, in 2015

