

Career Choices and Training in the Labour Market for Conductors

Abstract

Attempting to build a flexible, evolving and emergent research design I first looked at the theoretical and empirical progress reflected in the literature about artist's labour market. Identifying the "knowledge gaps" I could formulate a research question and build a first instrument for data collection (coding scheme). Testing the coding scheme and improving it in the content analysis of secondary data¹ I could formulate some hypothesis for a survey². Opting for facilitative combination of methods (qualitative facilitates quantitative) I present the reasons behind this choice and I discuss the implied data analysis methods (inductive and deductive).

Consequently, my option will be to look first at the tradition of cultural economics and review the findings of the researchers who tested the human capital theory and the alternatives. This will allow me to identify the "knowledge gaps" and to try to build a theoretical framework that would be tested later on this research project for the master thesis.

Artists' training and occupational choices

Towse (2006) states that conforming to human capital theory, occupational choices are made on the basis of expected lifetime income and individual rational behaviour is thought to lead to an optimal allocation of human capital. Skill shortages encourage on-the-job training, jobs/professions requiring higher investment in education and professional training offer higher earnings to compensate the costs of study, and experience adds to human capital rewarded by higher earnings. But the artists may be not wealth maximizers and the question that rises is "*whether the choice of an arts occupation is based on the private rate of return to investment in human capital that is determined by the costs of schooling and artists' earnings*"(Towse, 2006:879). High indirect costs in the arts combined with lower lifetime earnings lead to the fact that discounted costs exceed discounted benefits. But this could be changed if we take into consideration a longer working life of some artists, the royalties' earnings from copyrights and the fact that they teach and adjudicate also after the retirement from performing. Due to the higher education provided free in some European countries and to the scholarship system in US the debate efficiency versus equity rises together with the question if the access to education should be restricted to avoid oversupply.

Distinguishing between 'art' element and 'craft' element of artistic training Towse (2006) states that even students in arts have years of experience before entering the colleges (and probably cultivating their innate abilities), they still need the facilities

¹ Initially I was planning to use more sources for biographical data and introduce them into the MAXQDA, the software for text analysis (<http://www.maxqda.com/>). Due to feasibility reasons I had to stop at *A to Z of Conductors* by David Patmore which contains 350 short biographies on approximately 800 pages. More than that, this booklet synthesizes information from all the important sources about conductors' career. An electronic version was obtained from the author and this made the work easier.

² A very important support I found at the American organization Conductors Guild (<http://www.conductorsguild.org/>), an organization that has over 1700 members (conductors or aspirants) all over the world. A pre test was done via email, and now is in preparation a web survey which hopefully will be completed this June.

offered by the colleges, the forums for displaying, the networks and information in order to make the career choices. A significant proportion of working artists did not receive specialist arts training and this finding contradicts human capital and sorting model as long as these artists succeed without formal training or a diploma. Certification seems to be highly correlated with formal schooling and they measure students achievement in following the curriculum but not very useful in signalling to employers. But there are also other screening devices such as prizes, awards at competitions, reputation and other forms of informal certification (Wijnberg, 2003; Menger, 2006). These might solve the information problem for the employers.

Art students form expectations about non-pecuniary rewards (Abbing, 2003). Citing Benhamou, (Towse, 2006) interpret this as opting for utility rather than money, but also for improving the reputation which has a particular importance for self-employed workers.

Resuming, some qualitative arguments may explain the weak effect of human capital influence on artists' earnings. These will give an account of the role of formal training and informal one (private lessons, apprenticeships etc.), tacit knowledge, early training, family background etc. Anyway, the appropriate model to explain artists' training and occupational choices is still to be found.

Methodology and methods

The epistemic position for this research design is influenced by Max Weber "*founder of interpretive social science because of the central importance he gave to the interpretative understanding of subjective meaning*" (Seale, p.13). Weber developed an action theory of society in which concepts as empathy and grasping the actor meaning are central. His method of understanding (*verstehen*) became very influential and referential among social scientists.

Concerning the methods choice I have opted for facilitative combination (qualitative facilitate quantitative). First a content analysis of biographical data using a pre defined coding scheme. This was sketched during literature review, but I let it open and improved it while I was advancing in the coding process. This flexibility made me consider it rather a qualitative method than quantitative even the distinction cannot be done so sharp. Second, some of the findings during coding process helped me build a questionnaire that will be applied to contemporary, active conductors (1700 members of Conductors Guild). The survey will be completed this June and the online questionnaire which is now tested and refined can be seen here: https://www.surveymonkey.com/s.aspx?sm=4iCXAReiU00gNu792t1rhA_3d_3d

Research questions

- 1. Which are the patterns regarding the career steps for successful conductors?* (coding of 350 biographies from A-Z of *Conductors*, by David Patmore)
- 2. How individual conductors perceive their career opportunities and outcomes and what strategies they pursue to advance their career?* (survey on 1700 members of Conductors Guild)

Preliminary results

At this point in time I have coded approximately 200 biographies and probably on 12th of June I will have coded all 350. The main insights that this content analysis will provide concerns: career longevity (length of career), career mobility (the number of countries in which a conductor had a job), the content of training/study, family

background, entrepreneurial abilities, repertoire specialization, key experiences, awards in conducting competitions in early career, record activity etc.

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