

Urban moving and learning : a European artists' insight

Sophie Louargant & Anne-Laure Amilhat-Szary

Colloque ville créative en questions IUG , 21 22 Octobre 2010.

Texte de synthèse de la communication

Artists Moving & Learning, Project: 143380-LLP-2008-BE-KA1SCR (2008-3601), National Report – France

How do mobilities favour learning effect for artists? What is their nature? Do they match a classical approach of learning in linguistic or technical terms or do mobility relied learning effects have secondary, not intended effect on creativity and culture? In which way (financial, learning exist, as to for artists are concerned? And how are those learning effects happen?

Our methodological choices have been determined by the need to tackle these core questions. They have led to choose a qualitative approach rather than a quantitative one and therefore the elaboration of a three steps methodological protocol:

- factual data analysis (cf. the following graphics),
- thematic analysis through the grid, allowing the evidencing of "learning effect categories",
- systematic discourse analysis through a language corpus analysis (143 pages of text)
- with the help of the ALCESTE software.

The sample of artists has been chosen to be representative of the different artistic fields and of different types of mobility, of geographical areas of France: metropolitan area (Grenoble, Paris), a rural area (South of France – Ardèche / Drôme), and the International Festival of Avignon. The research team also tried to respect a balanced male/ female distribution and to cover all ages. The research team contacted 20 artists and was able to conduct interviews with 16 of them. The choice of the artists has been done in relation to the knowledge networks of the researchers. Sixteen French artists have been, interviewed between July and November 2009. All interviews were conducted in face-to-face situation, mostly in the ateliers of the artists. After the Kick-Off meeting in December 2008 and the first Scientific Committee of February 2009, the research was launched in every country. In France, the essential of the survey was carried out in 2009, essentially around the summer period which was propitious to the interviews. 2010 was defined by the team as the year for the comparative work: the first months were dedicated to the finalization of the national report, taking into account the need for building good basis for comparison.

Factual findings

The distribution between men and women is, finally, not equal. A majority of male artists have been interviewed. This allocation is due to the artists' availability during the interviewing

campaign, since we had planned equality of representation on that basis. Men between 30 and 40 are over-represented in the sample, when the 20-30 and 50-60 age classes are more balanced from a gender point of view. On that basis, artists' distribution is comparable to the typical gender gap observed in mobility studies in Europe as to the 30-40 age class is concerned, whether for employment or working time issues. Artists are no exception. The artists' educational background is very traditional, with a majority reaching either Master level or Art School equivalents (the French system of Arts or Theater regional and national Schools). Most of them are in possession of a qualifying diploma such as the DNSP (diplôme National Supérieur des Beaux-Arts) or their equivalent from the national and regional "Conservatoires". Only four of the artists we met have a secondary education level diploma. One only has a manual training certificate (carpenter). The chosen artists are fairly allocated between the four main art sectors: dance, music, theatre, visual arts (with a majority of plasticians). Women and men are successively over-represented in each different art sector. Between 2008 and 2009, the majority of artists have realised mobility experiences within Europe and coincide with the European Union coherence criteria. The motivation for travelling can be grouped under two major criteria, that of training (looking for specific technical skills) and of presenting a creation (festival, residence), many times stimulated by francophone cultural affairs. Other trips are linked to the understanding of a set of techniques (tango dancing for example) or of a colleague's creative world (a choreographer, a musician) that have led the French artists to move further, outside the European Union: Argentina, Québec, Vietnam, Japan, Dominican Republic. Many of the interviewed artists also reveal a relationship of proximity and interest towards the Mediterranean basin: Algeria, Morocco, Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq. These territories represent a central issue in their respective work (cf. the presence of borders, men-women relationships...). Moving to West and South Africa was linked to professional opportunities and to the support of the French Foreign Affairs Ministry. Central and Oriental Africa appeared as a objective for some of the interviewees, but the definitive choice of the country (Mozambique, Senegal), answers the need of a real possibility of completing an artistic project. European countries, India, Japan, Quebec, Mexico have been privileged by French artists during the 2007-09 period; they have been visited twice or more.

Fourteen of the interviewed artists got a financial support from public institutions to realize mobility projects, those of regional/local level appeared as very important. What appears determining is the possibility of have access to information sources, and this is very much facilitated by contacts in the host city/country (they favour moving and also learning). The supporting institutions are:

- The network of French Institutes ("Institut Français"): payment of hotel fees, transportation in the context of festivals (but all testify that funding conditions have deteriorated: before, they used to organize festivals, today, they only finance hotel),
- The regions (Rhône-Alpes, Provence-Alpes / Côte d'Azur / PACA) and local governments,
- The universities,
- The EU.

In the French context, or, better said, within our artists' sample, there was no private or NGO funding, and all of the artists saw funding as "institutional" funding.

We have discovered that if material conditions did not determine the possibility of mobility for artists (they travel even without funding, and with very different professional status), nevertheless these did have a strong impact on the learning effect of the moving experience.

Moving and learning results

The interviewed artists had formal/official moving experiences, aiming different kind of experiences: teaching programmes (of techniques etc.), exchange, production etc., enabled. However, informal mobility (in the sense of absence of financing through an official organism) such as private travels, meetings etc. showed up to be as frequent and personally important for the artists as the formal ones.

The main finding of the analysis of the types of moving experiences favouring learning in the whole panel is that **all types of moving experiences seem to favour learning**: the formal as well as the informal one, long trips as well as short ones. Indeed, **learning effects and their intensity rather seem to be determined by the personal predisposition** (capacity/openness/curiosity/habitude to move during childhood /desire to overcome intellectual and cultural barriers) of the artists than the types of mobility themselves. Last but not least it is worth mentioning that all types of mobility tend to create a **snowball effect**. As the open cited, the interviewed artists tended to maintain the new contacts and to make further mobility experiences.

Towards a typology of mobility patterns

From those biographic elements and from the cartography presented above, we have determined a typology of artists' mobility. As every typology, it is a schematic way presentation, but it allows readability, knowing that every artist has mobilised or will mobilise one of those types of moving in his/her artistic career/ The following typology tries to describe the artist's mobility competency. It is based on the analysis of the interviewees' biographies and factual elements of the interviews. It also aims at making explicit the social capital of the artists through the quest of the expression of the following common criteria within the various interviews:

- Imaginaries of mobility
- Cultural and visual change lived during the moving experience
- Creativity and innovation stimulated by the mobility
- Mobility as a geographical escape from one's reality

This led us to distinguish four types of artists:

- The « **hypermobile artists** » are characterised by their regular frequentation of big international metropolises like London, Tokyo, New York, Buenos Aires.... They come for different reasons to these places: to sell their works of art, to participate to festivals or artistic residencies. They do not invest much in rural or peripheral urban places, islands or mountainous regions. A common characteristic is their high educational level in arts and/or their university education; they also all come from big agglomerations. What distinguishes them is their access to institutionalised and financed mobility, assuring to the artists a solid moving competence, while others, by choice or out of necessity, do stay in the same places on their own resources (5 artists).

- 2nd type: The « **portfolio artists** » often are younger and/or are in search for specific technical competencies. Their mobility is characterised by a unique move towards a place where they do not necessarily return. They are looking for a specific artist who masters a set (vocal, choreographic, or other) technique. Their common point with the "hypermobile" artists is their frequentation of the same metropolises. However, we notice that their perimeter of movement is larger. For example, one of the interviewed artists wanted to learn tango and moved to Buenos Aires, but in search of specialised dancers, she also frequented places outside of the capital. (5 artists)

- 3rd type: The "**artists in creative circularity**". These artists are looking for a creative itinerary, during each travel, they bound from one place towards another, they leave for long travels (6 month) to track a specific person or look for a precise place. They often are directors, or in charge of projects, used to build up group dynamics; at every place they visit, they see potentialities for common work with dancers or singers who are in possession of the requested technical criteria for the project. Their common point is a strong personal history with the visited country or continent (Asia) that they frequent (through the adoption of children, love stories, etc.). As such, their mobility is characterised by the visits of metropolises or specific places (Island, Indonesia). What also characterizes them is their ability to obtain public, institutional financings. (4 artists).

- 4th type: The "**gap artists**". Those artists show the particularity of longer sojourns in determined places. Once they are settled in that place, their precarious situation does not allow them to return to France rapidly. So they move around the place of destination, between metropolises and their peripheries, in a cluster of various moves), but also between countries of the same continent. This may also concern the quest for relationship to a remote insularity (Haiti), where tales, myths and legends come to fuel the creative universe of the artist.

As for learning is concerned, the artist has generally admits having gathered a lot from his mobility(ies) :

- from an artistic point of view: - development of one's creativity,
- acquisition/ development of new techniques,
- transgression of one' artistic domain (new forms of
- expression may be learned may allow the artist to
- switch towards other types of art);
- from a general point of view : - development of foreign language skills (but where
- language revealed to represent an important
- communication barrier, it is art itself which has
- sometimes used for communication, especially in the
- sectors of music and dance,

- **the artist has acquired/developed other professional competences** essential for his/her career development (how to market his/her arts products, organize a production /dissemination process, how to raise funding, etc.).

- the development of further civic competences,

- This confrontation is generally propitious to questioning one's own way of behaving and one's interpretation schemes.

In the domain of learning too, we have thrived to build a strong methodology. **We have tried to classify all the acquired skills and competences through a typological work based on social and spatial capital literature, which has led us to build a grid**

which will may as a common tool for the European comparison. We thus distinguish learning processes according to the type of capitalization that they engender, and which could be either Spatial, Social, Economical, Cultural or concern Organization.

This cannot be translated into a variety of competences which an individual learns to manage, by acquiring a personal capacities port-folio in **Communication, Dissemination, Information, Networking, Pedagogy, Self-status bettering.**

Comprehensive approach of learning and moving: first conclusions of the textual analysis by the *ALCESTE* method

From a methodological point of view, the corpus collected through the interviews has been submitted to a textual comprehensive statistical analysis : the textual kind of information escapes from a purely qualitative analysis and can also be treated in a quantitative way... The lexical analysis consists in using language item redundancies and statistics to substitute the reading of a text by the analysis of the lexical elements which are extracted from it: lists of the most frequently used words (key-words), maps visualising the way words are associated (thematic zones) or circumstances or contexts effects (specific words). The collected textual material for the Artists' Moving and Learning project appears to constitute a very homogenous corpus. This characteristic itself reveals a very high coherence between the different artists' narratives, which makes their positioning very signifying about themselves and their identities. Within the overall corpus, four classes of lexical fields have appeared, representing four lexical fields which are then, in a second phase, put into correlation.

They do not have the same importance and can be qualified according to their proportional weight:

- 1/ The first field (19, 6% - red) insists on what is linked to professional **and spatial learning from mobility**. Two main ideas appear:
 - the logistical financial obligation (funding, grants) of the mobility,
 - the mobilization of networks and institutions to get to precise destination: EU, Peru, New York.

That lexical field is very explicit on the link between the professional objectives and the artists' moving capacity: learning is clearly professional, technical, and coincides with the artists' own field of competencies (either technical or commercial)

- 2/ The second field (41% - green), the main one, is that of **esthetical learning from mobility**. We find here a strong correlation between what concerns formalisation, images, visuals, colours and what expresses alterity: the frontier, the limit. So there, what is at stake is the artists' capacity to reconstitute within their production the thematic of mobility itself. Within this lexical field, we find again interrelations, connectivities. The main idea is that of an aesthetic value of mobility.

- 3/ The third lexical field (25, 6% - blue) concerns the **cultural learning from mobility**. The cultural discovery is associated to the discovery of techniques. The verbs "exist" and "change" do appear within the class, expressing this idea of discovery.

- 4/ The fourth lexical field (13,3% yellow) is that one of **social learning**. The main idea is that the words of this class express links, relations to education, children, expression and the life of territories. For all interviewed artists, the interface aspect appears as being the most transversal of all

terms concerning learning in the whole corpus; it is at the heart of the all discourses. Very clearly, the third lexical field (cultural learning) represents the "pivot" between the three others. It shows that the artists' positioning is generally one of a moving and comprehensiveness, or, at the other end of the gradient, as teachers. The closest correlations which appear are those existing between social and cultural learning (alterity, change). In opposition, reversely positioned, appear technical and aesthetic learning. The artist can therefore be defined by his competence of "relations making" and sociability. This can be expressed through three registers: the relationship to every-day life, the relationship to shape, the relationship to competence.