Who wants to become an arts manager?
A survey on applicants to master's programmes in arts and cultural management in France

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Abstract: Master's programmes in arts and cultural management require a wide range of skills (solid academic results in multiple disciplines, personal experience and involvement in the arts field, linguistic skills, personal and relational abilities) but they prepare students for an uncertain future in terms of employment and remuneration. Nevertheless they enjoy great success among French students. This apparent paradox has led me to investigate the social genesis of vocations for cultural management. My analysis of this genesis is based on a survey on applicants to these programmes, which sheds light on their sociological profiles and their motivations. I show that this career aspiration may stem from ethical motives, strategies against social downgrading or conversions of artistic vocations.

1. Introduction: Towards a sociology of arts managers

1.1. Overview of the literature on arts/cultural managers

As stated in a recent issue of the *Journal of Arts Management, Law and Society* (2010, 40-1), a predominant part of the literature on arts and cultural management[1] deals with arts management as an academic discipline and aims at improving professional activities and organisation in this field. Ebewo and Sirayi root for the autonomy of arts management as a specific discipline (Ebewo and Sirayi, 2009). Authors define the "skills and roles" of arts managers (Bendixen, P. 2000), specify the management abilities required to respond to the current cultural shifts (Dewey 2004), or promote "a discourse of practice to accompany more common discussions of practice as an aid to improve the field" (DeVereaux, 2009). Numerous papers focus on issues of training and curricula, with an analytic but above all practical orientation (Hutchens and Zöe, 1985; Martin and Rich 1998; Burns and Pichilingi, 2000; Sikes, 2000; Dewey and Rich, 2003; Brkić, 2009).

Comparatively, the sociological literature on arts management and arts managers is far less advanced. Richard Peterson gave an historical overview of the emergence of arts administration as a specific function (Peterson, 1986). Paul DiMaggio's research on the careers and opinions of US arts managers certainly remains the most important work on the topic (DiMaggio, 1987). More recently the tension between artistic and managerial logics has been investigated by Eve Chiapello (1998) and Ivonne Kuesters, who explains the contemporary role of arts managers who "take care" both financially and artistically (Kuesters, 2010) and by Katia Segers *et al.* who show the effects of arts managers professionalization on the artists' working conditions (Segers *et al.* 2010). The question of the careers has recently been studied under different angles; such as the role of gender (Herron et al., 1998), or the professional trajectories after the political changes in Russia (Tchouikina, 2010). But since DiMaggio's seminal book, we haven't learned much about arts managers as a professional group, and about their social and educational backgrounds and the values correlated to these backgrounds.

Nevertheless versatile professionals who may for instance raise funds for a dance company, implement a local cultural policy, or manage a theatre, play an important role in the socio-economic organisation of cultural activities. As Kirchberg and Zembylas put it: "Management, understood as taking care of arts and culture, implies having a strong concern for, and being existentially engaged in, this field. In addition, an ethical dimension of this activity is pivotal; commitment to arts and culture corresponds strongly with accepting responsibility for stakeholders and for a broader public." (Kirchberg, Zembylas 2010: 2). This suggests the usefulness of a sociological analysis of the characteristics of arts managers, their background and their representations. Indeed, these elements are necessary to understand the way they work and fulfil their functions. In other words, how could we know what cultural management is sociologically if we don't know who cultural managers are? Studying such aspects is also necessary in order to understand the social status of cultural managers in terms of position in the cultural field (in the sense of Pierre Bourdieu) and of social representations (e.g. prestige).

1.2. A contribution to this research agenda

In the scope of this broad agenda, which should include many aspects that I won't discuss in this paper, I chose to focus on what I would call the social genesis of vocations for arts management, preceding practices and careers in this field. Hence the simple question I ask in the title of this paper: who wants to become an arts manager? Answers to this question can teach us about the profiles of future arts managers, and about the position of these occupations in the social space, in terms of social and symbolic hierarchy, but also in terms of social values. In that sense, it is a first step towards a more complete sociology of arts managers.

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[1] In this paper I will use equally "arts" or "cultural" management (managers).

These answers are based on the results of a questionnaire filled by applicants to 19 Arts and Cultural Management Master's Programmes offered by French universities (Dubois, Lepaux, 2009). I have selected 796 answers among *circa* 1500 I received from February to July 2009. This questionnaire provides complete information on the applicants, including their social background, education, personal and professional experiences, cultural and artistic tastes and practices, wishes for future occupations and career goals. The answers are being analysed through statistical treatments aimed at distinguishing the sociological and educational profiles of the applicants and at explaining their involvement in the cultural field as future professionals. I complement this quantitative approach with information accumulated during my 20 years of teaching in such programmes and with empirical data collected in the application files and during selection interviews for these programmes. This research is a work in progress, since I am only in the early stages of the statistical treatments.

1.3. Some aspects of the French context

The occupations I will define as arts or cultural managers have neither a homogeneous definition nor homogenous statuses and activities. They are called cultural "administrateurs", "gestionnaires", "managers", "directeurs de projets". The scope of their activities goes from the curation of a music festival to a local administration dedicated to cultural affairs; from fund raising to communication. Jobs can be offered in the private sector of the cultural industries, in the public sector of State or local public administration, sometimes as permanent civil servants; given the specificity of the French cultural economy, very often in State subsidised organisations. They are close to the definition of "arts administrators" given by Richard Peterson in contrast with the classical model of the impresario (Peterson, 1986). These jobs began to be regarded as actual professions in the mid 1960's in the USA and about 20 years later in France, where their professionalisation has been fostered by State cultural policies (Dubois, 1999). The strong increase of public support to the arts and cultural activities brought about new career opportunities in the cultural field. It was also important to ensure (or at least to show) that public money was "well managed" by specialised professionals. It is in this context that the first training programmes dedicated to cultural management were launched in the mid 1980's with the support of the ministry of Culture. They met with great success not only in life-long learning but also with regular University students. They were extended in the 1990's, and again in the following decade with the Bologna process and the subsequent "L-M-D" (3-5-8) university reform giving incentives to create new vocational training programmes in French universities. A recent study listed 282 programmes in the field of cultural management including 168 masters, 88% of them being offered by universities or other higher education state organisations (Ministère de la Culture, 2008).[2] Numerous students wish to follow these master programmes. The most successful and selective of them receive 500 to 600 applications and select 20 to 30 students. This keen interest is not a temporary craze and proves the attractiveness of cultural management as a career, which this research intends to study.

2. Overview of the applicants' profiles

2.1. Social characteristics

- The first striking characteristic of the applicants' profiles is gender: 85% of them are female. This proportion is the highest one in French higher education with paramedical and social work schools (83%). It is higher than in arts and humanities university master's programmes (75%), and in State subsidised higher education art and culture schools (56%, with significant differences from a stream to another (library and heritage have the highest feminisation rate in these schools but it remains under 80%)).

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[2] For this research, I selected 22 Masters programmes and 19 out of them agreed to participate.

- Less striking statistically but nevertheless noticeable sociologically, many applicants have a privileged social background. The statistic treatment is ongoing and I am not yet able to give definitive figures on this important point, but I can say that two thirds of the applicants fit this criterion: at least one of their parents have occupations such as company managers, upper middle range civil servants, high school or university teachers. This rate is twice that of the total population of French higher education students. Under 20% of the applicants' mothers and under 10% of their fathers belong to the lower classes (most of them being office workers). When they belong to the middle classes, the parents are often schoolteachers or nurses, which denotes another important characteristic of the applicants' families: their level of education and higher cultural capital than the average students' families: 72% of the applicants' parents are graduates (51% for all students). This point tallies with their occupation fields: the three most important sectors are health (33 %), teaching (31 %) and culture (20 %).

2.2. Academic background

On this point, I also need further statistical treatment to give an accurate description. It is nevertheless possible to give some solid results. First, all indicators show that these applicants are good students. 80% of them passed their baccalauréat without delay (62% of students in total) 64% cum laude, 7% with the highest grade (against 3,8% of university students and 5,3 % of art school students). After the baccalauréat, a high number of students enrolled in selective and prestigious programmes such as "classes préparatoires" (classes which prepare students for the Grandes Écoles entrance exams, 24%) and Instituts d'études politiques (selective multidisciplinary programmes including law, history, economics and political science, 8%) – it is worth mentioning that less than 10% of the baccalauréat holders enrol in these programmes each year.[3] Around 20% of those who go to university chose arts and humanities programmes (4% literature, 4% music, 3% art history, 7% other subjects such as theatre or cinema). Apart from these selective programmes, university curricula chosen by the applicants include law, history, foreign languages, far more than economics on the one hand and disciplines that are lower in the social and symbolic hierarchy such as psychology and sociology on the other hand. We can add that applicants (claim they) have good linguistic skills: two third are fluent and 94% have intermediate level in at least one foreign language.

2.3. Experiences and attitude towards culture

The choice of a possible career within the cultural field is based on a cultural *habitus* constituted during the various stages of the socialisation process. This cultural *habitus* is partly inherited. Indeed, 20 % of the applicants have parents who work(ed) in the cultural field and 33% of them have relatives and 50% friends or acquaintances who also do (or did). More generally the social milieu is influential insofar as the parents seem to have more developed cultural habits than the general population (they read more, and go to the theatre and to see live music more often, instance).

This inheritance can also be observed though the fact that 90% of the applicants had an artistic practice during their childhood and adolescence (mainly music, 52%, dance, 45%, theatre, 33%). Almost 30% still learn an artistic discipline. Around 65% have had a regular artistic practice and 40% still have one. Their cultural practices are more intensive than those of other students, as shown in the following table.

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[3] Around 500,000 students pass the baccalauréat each year; less than 40,000 enter a classe préparatoire and around 2.500 an Institut d'études politiques.

Table 1. Shows, cultural events or institutions seen the 30 last days (%)

	Cinema	Theatre	Classical concert	Other concerts	Museum or exhibition
Applicants	85.5	43.7	16.3	45.1	81.7 (62.6/68.8)
Students in general*	64.6	12.2	7.9	22.9	28.3
Students in arts and literature*	70.6	28.8	17	34.5	50.2

* national survey, Observatoire de la vie étudiante, 2006

I can't display precise results on their cultural preferences here. Let me just say that most of the applicants share a certain degree of eclecticism in terms of arts fields (e.g. cinema + music + literature as important in tastes and practices) and in terms of cultural legitimacy (few of them are exclusively interested in elite culture and even fewer only in popular culture). But it doesn't mean that the "cultural omnivorism" hypothesis formulated by Richard Peterson directly applies to them since their tastes and practices mostly range from a high level of legitimacy (e.g. contemporary art, baroque music) to a medium level (e.g. non-commercial forms of rock music) when their dislikes are mostly focused on cultural forms with a low level of legitimacy appreciated by other people of their age (e.g. R&B/Hip Hop, heavy metal).

3. Hypotheses

To sum up, this paper intends to analyse the social, cultural and academic characteristics of the applicants to cultural management programmes, in order to explain for whom and why arts management can be regarded as a desirable choice. I consider the specific logics of these applications in the educational trajectories of the applicants, assuming that the applications reveal a vocation for cultural management, which is more precisely the object of this study. In order to propose interpretations of this orientation, I will briefly present three hypotheses focused on the curricular choice and explain why they don't provide a sufficient account of the strategies of applicants and don't match my data. Then, I will concentrate on four more relevant hypotheses focusing on career choices rather than on curricular choices.

3.1. Arts management as a curricular choice: three hypotheses to reject

- The rational choice hypothesis

This classical hypothesis consists in viewing curricular choices as resulting from rational anticipations evaluating the productivity of training programmes in terms of job access and future earnings in light of the educational investments these programmes require (see for instance Gabay-Egozi *et al.*, 2009). If we adopt a strictly utilitarian point of view, the choice of arts management programmes can seem absurd: the high selectivity of such programmes requires an important academic capital (and other resources, as we will see later on) and an intense involvement from students, when the cultural field is known (in France at least) for frequent job precarity and relative underpayment.

- The procrastination hypothesis

A second hypothesis consists in positing that students choose these programmes in order to postpone their career choice or their confrontation to the job market; or simply to enjoy one more year of student life. This kind of attitude is not rare in France due to low tuition fees and because of the high unemployment rate even for qualified young people. But it doesn't apply to arts management

programmes because of their high selectivity, their intense workload (including a long internship) and the fact that they require a career plan before admission.

- The "no choice" hypothesis

Another hypothesis is that the students applying for arts management programmes do so because they are unable to apply successfully to other programmes. A) This could result from their bad results in previous programmes. As we will see, it is not the case, the vast majority of applicants being good students, and often excellent ones. B) Another reason could reside in their previous specialisation in this field, preventing them from choosing something else. This can occasionally happen but it is very seldom the case: only around 5% of applicants have previously followed programmes related to arts management. For this small minority, we should analyse the making of the vocation one or two years before in the curricula. C) We could also think that their previous training and degree are not useful enough to get a job and that arts management appears as one of the few possibilities of a curricular change in which their academic capital could be reinvested. This can be partly true for students in humanities (less than a third of applicants) who in the French system are often not well prepared to enter the job market unless they want to become teachers. But many aspects of their experience outside school (participations to cultural life, internships, readings, jobs) show that arts management is most often a real choice and not a non-choice or a choice by default.

Several indicators back up this statement. 75% of the applicants have done an internship (50% more than one) in the cultural field, which amounts to twice the percentage of internships in other fields. These internships are often long ones: the average duration is up to seven months. Half of the applicants have already worked in the cultural field and not only as a summer job (10 hours a week during the year for almost 25%), mostly in unqualified jobs but also as guides or music teachers.

Half of the applicants present their plan to enter a cultural management programme as a long-term one, which they have settled on at the beginning of their higher education or even before that. Also, half of them apply for several programmes in this field to maximise their chances to be enrolled (30% more than three applications).

Lastly, the choice of cultural management is predominantly exclusive: only one third apply for a master's programme in another sector. No precise competing sector emerges clearly: the four more frequent ones are communication and public relations (7%), European studies (4,5%), journalism (4%) and arts (with surprisingly only 3%).

We then have to consider alternative hypotheses assuming the existence of arts management as a real career choice.

3.2. Art management as a career choice: three hypotheses to investigate

3.2.1. Changes in artists' vocations

As we have shown, the vast majority of applicants have had an artistic experience (artistic education and artistic practices). One applicant out of three has considered pursuing a career as an artist (most often as a musician or as an actor) and 15% still do (most often as a writer). These elements are not sufficient to view would-be cultural managers as failed artists, contrary to a common prejudice. But they draw our attention to the relationship between artistic and cultural management vocations.

It would be simplistic to consider this relationship only in terms of artistic failure that would lead to cultural management as a remedial career plan. If we think in terms of habitus combining inheritance, socialisation, attitudes and individual trajectories, we could identify social predispositions to view activities in the cultural field in general as desirable and as a source of personal satisfaction. If we do so we can assume that these social predispositions are expressed in different ways during the course of

the applicant's personal experience and according to the steps of the socialisation process. Planning to become an artist, participating in cultural associations or getting involved in cultural management programmes can be some of these diverse expressions which vary according to the changes in the realm of "the thinkable and the possible" to quote Pierre Bourdieu. In that sense there wouldn't be a break between a (failed) artistic vocation and the (constrained) choice of cultural management but rather a continuity between these two plans as diverse expressions of the same predispositions.

If we now look at the 15% of those who still consider a career as an artist we can suggest two combined interpretations. Cultural management can be viewed by would-be professional artists as a backup plan. Even if the job market is difficult in this field too, cultural management can be seen as offering more secure jobs than an artistic career and be part of temporary or long-term anticipations, switching from art to management when necessary and going back when possible or making a more long-term career change. The other possibility is related to organisational changes in the art world where artistic and non-artistic activities are more embedded than ever. Studies on artistic work and employment, especially in the performing arts, show that some artists now view management as a necessary secondary skill to get funds, organise their shows or direct a theatre company. In that sense, not only are there career changes from arts to cultural management, but there are also developing ties between the two in the concrete activities and the careers of the art world's members.

3.2.2. Reasserting cultural and ethical dispositions

Let's now consider the situation (which is to some extent to the opposite of the previous one) of students who don't have artistic vocations and have graduated not in arts or literature but in elite management schools (10 to 15% of the population).[4] Here cultural management is not at all a choice by default since students could envision careers in various fields with generally more interesting job perspectives in terms of security and income. Of course a job in the cultural field is a means of symbolic distinction (Bourdieu): I will elaborate on this dimension later on. We can also assume that these specific students view a career in the cultural field as an opportunity to circumvent the standard model of achievement promoted in such schools (high earnings, quick promotion, power positions) and replace it by a model of personal achievement valorising freedom, initiative, selflessness, creativity, personal relationships and so on. In that sense the choice of culture is not only a matter of a distinction; it is also a moral and a political one in the broad sense of the term. Indeed they share the "new spirit of capitalism" (Boltanski, Chiapello, 2006), that is to say they distance themselves from the dominant socio-economic system and criticize it as hindering self-fulfilment (which is the main argument of the "artistic critique" analysed by Boltanski and Chiapello) but also incorporate this critique in the functioning of this system. At the individual level they look for an occupation which can combine integration to the economic system and self-fulfilment and provide them moral as well as financial benefits. This could be an explanation for their acceptation of precarious and underpaid jobs, which on the other hand can bring them a feeling of personal achievement (and on the other hand their rejection of standard occupations).[5]

3.2.3. Social strategies

The individual strategies of changes in artistic vocations and of reasserting cultural and moral dispositions are embedded in a broader social context. Accordingly, we must complement these two hypotheses by taking more directly into account the collective structure of professions and social classes.

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[4] Very few students come from management schools in the narrow sense of the term. Here we mostly think of the Instituts d'études politiques which tend to be schools for future executives both in the private and the public sector.

[5] In that respect we could draw a link between vocations to cultrural management and humanitarian work.

Pierre Bourdieu proposed such an analytical frame for the 1960's and the early 70's (Bourdieu, 1984). He has shown that, during that period, the new qualified middle class found a path to social promotion by "inventing" new professions in the cultural field in the broad sense of the term. As Bourdieu explains: "This 'creative redefinition' is therefore found particularly in the most ill-defined and professionally unstructured occupations and in the newest sectors of cultural and artistic production […] where jobs and careers have not yet acquired the rigidity of the older bureaucratic and recruitment is done generally by co-option, that is, on the basis of 'connections' and affinities of habitus, rather than formal qualifications" (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 151). This can remain partly true in some specific sectors but the professionalisation of these occupations the increasing formalisation of their training and the intensified competition for their recruitment strongly reduced the possibilities for "creative redefinition". Furthermore, my results show a shift in the social recruitments of these cultural intermediaries. The lower middle class and working class family backgrounds which were predominant in the rise of the new qualified bourgeoisie in the 1960's and 1970's are nowadays a small minority among the applicants to cultural management programmes.

We could say that in this case the logic of social and cultural promotion has been replaced by a wellknown logic of social and professional reproduction. We have to keep in mind that 20% of the applicants have one of their parents working in the cultural field. It is of course still a minority but we can think that the applicants are children of the new bourgeoisie analysed by Bourdieu rather than rising new qualified bourgeois. This is an important point regarding the social significance of cultural management occupations in terms of class. It is important also in terms of profession since the institutionalisation of these occupations can be reinforced by the hereditary transmission of positions.

Let's come back to social mobility. If upward mobility is no longer important, or at least far less important than it used to be, another logic conversely consists in viewing cultural management as a possible choice in strategies against social downgrading. Here, I am referring to children (as we have seen, mostly girls) coming from the upper middle and upper classes and with a good academic background, who have difficulties in maintaining their inherited social position because of the high unemployment rate and/or because of the depreciation of their qualification (in the case of humanities or literature) on the job market. They may consider a career choice in cultural management as a means to maintain their social status thanks to the symbolic value of arts and culture. (This brings us back to the distinctive uses of culture). This hypothesis could also provide an explanation to the massive overrepresentation of female applicants: we know that the "sexual division of social reproduction" in the bourgeoisie, to quote Bourdieu again, traditionally attributes symbolic work and social relations to girls when boys are expected to guarantee the economic capital. Cultural management would in that sense tend to replace the role that teaching used to play in these reproduction strategies until the mid 1980's, that is to say, before the depreciation of teaching careers and since the development of cultural management as a possible career choice. It is indeed noticeable that almost none of the applicants consider teaching as a possible career whereas their family background (10% of the applicants' fathers and 25% of their mothers are teachers) and their academic profile could prepare them to become teachers.

4. Conclusion

As a conclusion I would like to start a discussion on the relationship between training, vocations and occupations in order to explain the social attractiveness of cultural management as a career choice. The prospect of employment is not sufficient to explain this attractiveness and while the symbolic value of culture undoubtedly plays an important role, it is a far too general explanation to be entirely satisfying. Then I will develop five main propositions.

1- Offer of specialised training in this field contributes to the making of vocations in cultural management among students.

2- It also contributes to intensifying the competition on the job market and to raising the requirements of recruitment.

3 In return, this reinforces the job applicants' need for certified training.

4. The way cultural management has developed during the last decades (*i.e.* professionalisation without strict formalisation neither of the positions nor of the recruitment) facilitates students' career plans for such occupations.

5. Given the various possible profiles of students who consider choosing cultural management, we can say that the attractiveness of cultural management is rooted in aspirations and projections concerning the cultural field in general rather than related to specific occupations or, to sum up, on arts and culture as a valuable sector rather than on management as a motivating activity.

"Culture" is more important than "management" in vocations to cultural management while it is often the reverse in actual work practices in such occupations. This should bring new researches on job satisfaction in this field which could be another contribution to the agenda of a sociology of cultural management.

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