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# BIOGRAPHY OF ARTS MANAGEMENT AS A FIELD OF PRACTICE



*International Bistro Lecture Series* guest Vincent Dubois was recently interviewed by LEAP Master's student Samantha Rose. The interview follows. Mr. Dubois will be giving his e-lectures on "Cultural Management as a Career Choice: A sociological approach," on Thursday, April 9, 9 a.m., UCA Rm. 158.

The tension between practitioner and scholar in arts management has received a lot of attention ever since the field entered academia. The issue boils down to whether or not practitioners benefit from the work of scholars.

Does the research scholars do translate into better arts management practice? Practitioners sometimes feel that “getting your hands dirty” by working in the field is the best kind of research, while scholars may contend that stepping back into theory deepens the understanding one might gain from hands-on work.

Vincent DuBois, sociologist, political scientist and Professor at the Institute for Political Studies in Strasbourg, is very much the scholar. He’s also the guest lecturer at our next International Bistro Series. He’ll be discussing his most recent book *La culture Comme Vocation* [Culture as a Vocation], and his analysis of arts management as a career choice.

Samantha Rose interviewed Prof. Dubois about his recent book, the role arts managers play in society, and in the cultural policy sphere, and why it’s important to know more about cultural management from a research perspective.

**SR:** What would you say are the key differences between cultural policies in Europe vs. the developing field of Arts Management in the United States?

**VD:** Before comparing Europe and the US, I must recall that there are huge differences regarding cultural policies from one European country to the other. You can have a look at the paper I just published last week on the topic: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/B978-0-08-097086-8.10419-2>

I would say that a major difference lies in the fact that in most European countries, the private patronage of the arts is much weaker than in the US. It is especially the case in France, despite generous tax incentives. Countries like Italy or the UK, however, have a stronger tradition of private funding. I believe these differences have been decreasing over the last two decades, because of a tendency to cut public budgets for culture in many places.

**SR:** What should students who are interested in international cultural or public policy keep in mind as they start out in these fields?

Firstly, that what is called “culture” and “cultural policy” may differ from one place to another. For example, entertainment is sometimes included, whereas in other countries cultural policy is mostly limited to high culture. Secondly, that these questions are strongly related to social and political issues, such as the relationships between social classes, the role of the state vs. the private sector, or the balance of power between the national state and local authorities. Thirdly, that the organization of professions is rooted in national contexts, which is conducive to possible differences in activities and job requirements.

**SR:** In Cultural Policy, what do you believe research has to contribute to both the field, and to the academic community?

**VD:** I do think that research plays a role in cultural policy. If I may refer once again to my own work, I have shown that a prominent social scientist as Pierre Bourdieu, did play an indirect but important role in the conceptualization of cultural policy goals; in terms of access and democratization. For instance and reference, the following article <http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0304422X11000726> explores knowledge in cultural participation is a key aspect. In addition to that, I think research is also useful to better understand cultural employment and the complex organizational aspects of the cultural field, in relation to other social milieus (the media, private donors, the public sector and so on).

Conversely, I think research on cultural policy contributes to academic knowledge, especially because it provides an excellent opportunity to embrace a number of social, economic, symbolic, political, esthetic aspects which

define contemporary societies.

**SR:** One of your most recent books, *The Sociology of Wind Bands*, shows research into a field of music that is often overlooked. What made you interested in this subject and how did you approach the research of wind music?

**VD:** I became interested in this music precisely because it is overlooked. Indeed, I conceived this research as an empirical case study to address the theoretical question of cultural hierarchies and how people experience them. I could say it is “a view from below” of the making and of the reproduction of cultural classifications; complementing for instance what Lawrence Levine did from a historical point of view in his beautiful book on cultural hierarchies in 19th century America (*Highbrow, lowbrow*).

**SR:** Another of your most recent books, *La Culture Comme Vocation* [Culture as a Vocation], looks at arts management as a career; can you explain a little about what this book discusses with future and current arts managers in mind?

**VD:** This will be the topic of my LEAP lecture, which I am currently revising the English version to be published in September. My research question is the following: why a growing number of students and young people consider arts management as a career choice, despite strong difficulties in accessing permanent jobs in this field? To answer this question, I look at the general context of cultural professions and of the higher education system, at the profiles of applicants to arts management programs, and analyze on these bases the reasons for such an orientation, in terms of self-fulfillment, or social mobility strategies, for instance.

**SR:** Is there anything else you would like people who are attending your lecture to know?

**VD:** I am a social scientist and not a practitioner, and my critical analysis may sometimes puzzle those who have only practice-driven questions in mind. But I think this is how social sciences are useful, by asking questions people do not ask themselves any more, and, hopefully, by helping them to find answers.

~ submitted by Samantha Rose

April 9, 2015 by: Jennifer Clary

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