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The paradox of working to finance work

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New data collected by Sound Diplomacy confirms that, in many cases, art workers need another job to sustain their work in the arts.

The vast majority of professional artists cannot meet their financial obligations. Yet for most of them, working in the arts is their only source of income. New data collected by Sound Diplomacy through it's projects confirms what seems to be common knowledge among art workers and is increasingly illuminated by new qualitative and quantitative studies.

The data is presented in a special article signed by Sound Diplomacy contributors Ramón Woodyatt and Eduardo Saravia, who raise concerns about what they call the culture financing culture paradox. Citing additional literature and studies such as those by David Throsby, Hans Abbing and Justin O'Connor, the authors of the article point out that artists seem to have a much higher intrinsic motivation than most other professions, and that those who do not receive sufficient economic remuneration for their artistic work often have to take on several jobs in order to support themselves.

According to the authors of the article, the paradox arises from the fact that as artists take on more non-artistic work to support their creative pursuits, they end up spending less time on their art. And this challenge affects the majority of artists.

“In all the projects where we work to design musical and cultural strategies for cities, we encounter a common problem: artists cannot cover their basic needs with their income from artistic creation” the authors of the article note. Sound Diplomacy's data from professional artists shows that only 27% of respondents can meet their basic needs through their creative work, while 73% cannot. For 75% of the artists who responded, all of their income comes from sources related to their artistic work, compared to 25% who said it was non-artistic income.



The situation is often even more challenging for semi-professional and amateur artists. These individuals typically have fewer opportunities to earn income from their art and often rely on other jobs to support themselves. “The financial disparity is more dramatic for these groups as they juggle multiple roles while trying to nurture their artistic passions” says the article.



In response to this phenomenon, the authors of the article propose Justin O' Connor's analysis, which underlines the need to move away from viewing culture solely as an industry and instead embrace its role as a public good. This approach calls for policies that directly support artists, recognising their essential role in enriching society.

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