

# The Professional Identity of Cultural Producers

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## Introduction

The professional title of cultural producer is very young and rather unstable in Finland: the first cultural producers graduated from the University of Applied Sciences in 2001. A cultural manager or producer works in the field of art and culture - more often behind the curtains and backstage. He or she organizes an event's scheduling, budgeting, marketing communication, customer service, and other organizing support for the artists and technical participants. Often the producer is also the key person in the production process. In brief, he or she pulls the strings in art and cultural productions and organizations. The profession is a mixture of management, administration, and physical work. It offers an interesting development path to a profession of the postmodern world, which has been created by joining the different sides of separate disciplines and practical trades. In my opinion it is itself the creation of the postmodern world without the weight of history attached to it.

Until the 1990s the field of Finnish culture was mainly based on public financing; cultural events and activities were organized by municipalities' cultural workers or other public cultural institutions. Because of the lack of public funding and Finland's EU membership, the field of cultural organizations and the Finnish cultural policy have changed during the last decades. Nowadays many local cultural events are financed by the EU and they are part of some rural developing project. Amateur or non-profit based events and festivals also form an important part of the Finnish cultural field. Today the employer of a cultural producer is usually an organization of citizens; otherwise cultural producers are self-employed.

It is typical for Finnish cultural producers that many have worked without professional education or have taken only short courses in the field of cultural management (economy, communication, leadership...). Their educational background can also be artistic: instead of becoming a professional artist they have decided to work as a producer.

Questions of identity have been studied a lot in social and humanist sciences. It is typical for the postmodern era that personal identity is very flexible and is seen as an ongoing process. According to Williams (2000), a person's identity is changing all the time and it is very multi-sided. Identity can be a result of negotiation. A strong professional identity is often very important; professional identities are also constantly changing and mirroring the requirements and changes in the work process.

The aim of my licentiate study is to examine the professional identity of cultural producers. So far I have interviewed ten persons who work as a cultural producer. I transcribed all interviews and at the moment I am analysing material. I also have searched researches of professional identity and connected my study to previous studies.

In this seminar paper I will first briefly address the profession of cultural manager or producer and the field of cultural management. Secondly, I will move on to my research process and methodological orientations. Then I will examine my theoretical background: What is the connection between a producer's personal identity and his or her professional identity? What kind of an ongoing process we are talking about, if one doesn't have professional education, or one's professional roots are in the field of arts and crafts? In general, how is professional identity shaped during an individual's vocational growth? Finally, I will also analyse the results of my initial research.

### **The cultural manager and the field of cultural management**

The term 'cultural management' is slowly becoming into use as a wider concept, replacing the term 'art management'. According to Constance DeVereaux, 'cultural management' has been more widely in use in the United States in the field of arts. The current term became common gradually, as an extension of its narrower predecessor. (DeVereaux 2009:112.) Yet, as far as I can see these two concepts are still often used interchangeably.

Megan Matthews from the University of Wisconsin (2006) (in Chong (2010:5-6)), defines arts management as an exciting field in which the business, art, and organisation abilities combine to the people and communities "in an affecting way". An arts manager is a person who works in the field of art administration and who in some way makes art possible. The arts manager simply brings the art and the public together.

According to Clancy (1994:1; 1997:341), the professionals who work in arts management balance an art and an administration/the management on the fields and try to understand both. The workers act as mediators between different financiers, artists, and the public. Often the priorities and values are separate from that of a culture field. Working in arts management is more a profession than a career, and emotional commitment to the artistic aims is crucial. Furthermore, working in arts management means also the management of creativity and innovations in which economic risks also are taken.

The need for cultural management in Finland has increased in relation with the change in the financing of the art and a culture field. Traditionally, the Finnish public sector has supported culture and art organisations, but since the 1990s this is no longer the case. Instead, cultural institutions are expected to intensify their operation.

In addition to the public sector, cultural producers work in the private and third sectors. The work varies drastically between sectors. In Finland, the public sector receives basic funding from tax payers; however, these job possibilities have diminished lately. The public art and culture institutions also need more financing from other sources. Private sector in the field of art and culture has increased in recent years; it is quite common to set up an enterprise while studying cultural management. The main idea of such companies is to make profit and find good products to sell. In Finland, cultural enterprises are rather small, often employing only their founder. Multinational events or record companies are quite another matter; however, such big companies are few and far between in a small country.

As an employer, the so-called free field or third sector has increased its volume drastically in the recent years. The actors in the free field fill the gap between the public and private sectors (Chong 2010:7-8). They are also a very heterogeneous group as the field contains hobby-based culture clubs, non-profit associations and foundations, but also cultural organisations with considerable sales. Many Finnish cultural events or festivals are organized by an association and its executive director. The sales of events can rise to several hundreds of thousands of euros and from the Finnish point of view, the association can be a considerable employer.

A part of the free field are also cultural managers who do not belong to any associations, or produce culture under their own business name or company. These amateurs create their own content - for example on the Internet - and can get huge publicity. Some of their innovations will grow up to be businesses; some of them will be forgotten. This kind of spontaneous cultural management will be an increasing challenge to the power medium and cultural management. The Internet particularly has changed the direction of cultural management in the recent years.

The Bachelor's degree in Cultural Management has been available in Finland since the late 1990s. Five universities of applied sciences are offering the degree, and some

universities also arrange short courses in arts or cultural management. The first cultural managers graduated in the early 2000s. The degree of cultural manager takes four years and it is 240 ECTS to complete. Nowadays almost two hundred professionals graduate every year in addition to those who have taken short courses at other universities. For that reason it is possible to say that the field of cultural management will be increasingly professional. Of course there still are many cultural producers who have not studied cultural management and still are professional at their job.

### **Research process and methodology**

In this chapter I will discuss my research process. First of all, however, I would like to tell why I am interested in this topic of constructing professional identities. I work as a senior lecturer of cultural management at the HUMAK, University of Applied Sciences. Our organization was the first in Finland to arrange a degree programme in Cultural Management. Although I have had a great view of the field, I would like to have deeper understanding what the field for which we are educating our students is, and how I as a teacher could support our students in their quest for future professional identities.

At this stage my research material consists of ethnographic career narrations. So far I have interviewed ten cultural producers who earn their living by producing events and festivals. Seven of them are women and three are men, and live all over Finland. Nine of my informants are ethnically Finns, one comes originally from Russia. Their age ranges between 27 and 57 years. Four have an academic education, but only three have a cultural producer's or producer's degree. In four cases, the employer is a non-profit organization, four work for the government or municipalities, two are entrepreneurs, and one a freelancer. Three are working in an EU or similar project. The professional title of the informants also varies. Two are cultural producers, one is a producer and one a producer-artist; one is a musician-producer-project worker. Four are executive managers. One is an entrepreneur. In this paper I will call them Alice, Caroline, Lisa, John, Thomas, Paul, Susan and Sharon.

I interviewed cultural producers who have specialized in producing events and festivals based on folklore, history, or local culture. This definition was important because the field of culture is very wide and a cultural producer's work encompasses everything from sport

events to ICT business and media. Furthermore, after Finland joined the EU, Finns have become concerned about their local identity, heritage, and folklore. Overall, it is very difficult to say how many producers exist in these areas, because there are no lists or catalogues. I made a list of my own when researching for suitable informants; so far my list includes about fifty producers. Most of them I have found by using Google or other search engines, some were already known to me thanks to my work and personal networks. As my purpose was to find as heterogeneous a group as possible, I selected informants based on their geographical location, job, sex, age, and education.

Before the interviews I felt rather confident because of the background information I had gathered, and because I have quite a lot of interview experience. Although I had a list of questions and themes with me, I did not necessarily always follow it strictly. I used it more as a checklist: Did I ask all necessary questions, had I forgotten something? My purpose was to touch on the same subjects and themes in each interview, but sometimes we did not have enough time or the interviewee skipped some subject and began to talk about something else, despite my guiding questions and comments.

I recorded all interviews and as soon as possible transcribed them. I tried to be as careful as possible in my representation of the interviewees' speech, writing down every word except repetitions or unclear expressions. Using this transcription method one interview was 17-28 pages. So far I have read through my material once. While reading I marked some themes which rose up from the texts. After that I collected thematic groups from every transcription. Many of the conclusions of this paper are based on this initial analysis.

### **New career challenges of cultural producers**

Today's work life poses many challenges. It is strongly stamped by over-professionalism and by the competences required by it, the multi-professionalism, by the crossing of vocational limits, by divided expertise, by vocational mobility, flexibility, and lifelong learning. On the basis of these demands one realises the importance of vocational identity and its significance in the complex working life. However, it would seem that the worker must be able to perceive their own identity in relation to work and profession. Many professions require an enterprising attitude to work. The worker must know how to identify,

estimate, and market one's know-how, and also be aware one's vocational identity in order to be successful. (Eteläpelto and Vähäsantanen 2006:27, 40)

Because the jobs of the 2000s are mainly short in duration and consist of diverse projects, people are compelled to think about their attitude towards the field and their profession. Two Finnish adult educationists, Anneli Eteläpelto and Katja Vähäsantanen (2006:28) emphasise that in artistic and scientific work - which requires a creative personal responsibility and strong commitment - personal growth require the redefinition of one's vocational identity. I would see a cultural manager's work requiring particular creativity, personal control, and commitment. Furthermore, it is work in which an event's manufacturing process dictates the manager's work rhythm. Even in the case of yearly events or festivals the planning of a new event must be always begin nearly at zero. The recurring and novel creation is the living condition of annual productions.

### **Professional identity as a part of personal and social identity**

Questions of identity have been studied since the 1950s in social and humanist sciences, which divide the human identity into two: the social and the personal. Their relationship has received different emphasis according to different approaches (see e.g. Erikson 1959; Mead 1962; Tajfel 1981). According to Richard Jenkins, the social identity consists of our understanding of who we are and who other people are. It is the product of like-mindedness and disagreement, open to negotiation. Jenkins stresses the fact that a human being defines oneself and one's individuality continuously in relation to other people; thus both the personal and social identification is continuously in process. (Jenkins 1996:5, 20)

The central result of identity studies in the 1990s is that in the postmodern world, no identity definition is constant. According to Stuart Hall (1996, 1999), the structural change in the modern society at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century has forced personal identities on the move; it has also shaken our ideas of ourselves as uniform subjects.

The definition of identities is complicated: on the one hand, a division has been made between a personal and cultural identity, and on the other hand between individual and social identity. However, none of these divisions are simple or clear-cut. The definition of identity varies in different contexts and a human being can identify oneself when

necessary on a general or on a more detailed level. Identities are not right or wrong in either case, but open to change; they are not static but fluctuating, conditional, and subjectively edited (Brown et al. 2007:40).

According to Hall the questions, “Who am I?” and “Where do I come from?” are not only important in the identity process. The question, “What I will become?” is also important. It is important how the resources provided by history, language, and culture are used when becoming something and not just being something. (Hall 1999:250)

One aspect of identity is in how a person presents oneself in a social environment as a representative of a certain profession. This presenting is a result from how individuals negotiate themselves in relation to others, what they do and how they bring out it. (Eteläpelto 2007:122) I am particularly interested in how cultural managers talk about their profession, work and the future. One’s commitment to work and the field, the change of a job or production can tell about how one reacts to the work and how significant a part it plays in one’s life.

The concept of narrative identity is present in my study, mainly because my research material consists of career narratives, which are a part of the life historical narratives. However, I use narrative study as a method, and narrative identity as a tool in examining professional identities. Narratives are a way of producing professional identity as a story. I agree with Bruner (1990:105) in that narrative identity is produced and actualised in the narrative stories of the individual of past, present, and future. The narrator also justifies why it was important that the life went in a certain way (Bruner 1990:121). Even though a part of interview research is to clarify *how* the stories have been told, from the point of view of my own study it is more important to know *what* has been told and *why*. According to Bruner (1990:105), narrative is connected with acting, and I am interested in the clarifying how this acting works.

Eteläpelto and Vähäsantanen (2006:26) continue Bruner’s idea about active identity when they define vocational identity as a concept of a vocational actor, based on a life history: how does a subject understand oneself at the moment in question in relation to work and professionalism, and what does one want to become in work and profession. It also includes the values concerning work, as well as ethical dimensions, objectives and beliefs.



I understand 'vocational identity' partly as a person's personal and social identity which describes the relationship between a person and work from many sides. In the concept of vocational identity social and cultural practice of the trade are bound together. People give different meanings to work and its values. 'Professional identity' can be distinguished from personal and social identity because work, operating in a profession and professionalism are such wide sectors for an individual that they shape and build their own vocational identity on top of the personal and social identity. Work and profession also mean very different things to different people: for some, it is the central thing in their lives, and for others it is only a way to earn money during the office hours. Eteläpelto (2007:108) states that work identities are always dynamic: they change with life experience and their significance varies at different stages of the life cycle.

The term 'work identity' also covers acting, which constructs an individual's identity. A professional identity is always the result of a certain practice community in which socialising, learning, and interaction are key elements. In this process, individuals are considered as actors or agents who actively reflect external feelings. Thus the work shapes the individual but at the same time the individual edits work processes and structures. (Kirpal 2004 and Eteläpelto 2007:108) All my informants do independent work and can concretely influence their own work. They are active actors and edit their own work processes and the practices of the whole cultural management field continuously. The management of one's own work is a precondition for operating in the profession.

Simone Kirpal (2004) headed a EU-financed research project concerning work identities, "Vocational identity, flexibility and mobility in the European labour market" in which work identities were studied in seven European countries (United Kingdom, Spain, Greece, France, Germany, Czech Republic and Estonia). The central questions concerned the construction of identity shapes in different jobs. The study shows how individuals will identify with their work when they have to get over the increasing flexibility and mobility demands, changing working conditions, and growing know-how demands. The study group represents different trades: metal industry, health care, telecommunication and information field, and tourism. Five hundred workers and a hundred superiors were interviewed.

In Kirpal's study, work identities are understood as complex and many-sided phenomena, and conceptualised in four dimensions: historical, economical, social, and individual-

psychological. The two latter ones are most salient from the point of view of my own work. Social work identity has been understood originally as something created for others in interaction: for colleagues, superiors, customers, teams, professional communities and institutions, such as companies, trade unions and education institutions. Individual-psychological identity refers to an individual's professional history, career development, observations of the working environment, and personal work attitude. The latter consists for example of the things a worker regards as significant in the work, the feeling of belonging, attitudes related to the work, learning to consider the importance of development and managing, and relations to fellow workers. (Kirpal 2004) In my own study I approach the construction of the professional identity very much from the same starting points. I concentrate, like Kirpal, on a subjective point of view - the experiences and feelings of an individual.

The most central result of Kirpal's study was that socialisation to the work was seen through a certain education, validity, and attitudes. The socialisation will take place when an individual takes care of certain tasks, belongs to a certain occupational group or to a company through which he or she internalises certain norms, values, attitudes, and vocational standards. (Kirpal 2004) For the cultural managers interviewed by me, socialisation means being born into the trade through the networks and one's life and work history. The educational background of my informants is very heterogeneous, and there is no official authorised validity to the working in the field.

According to Kirpal, the professions and occupational groups are losing their significance as targets of identification. In basing the identity on individuality and uniqueness would indeed be emphasised when an individual could build the idea of oneself as a representative of a profession on the basis of one's personal beliefs and views. On the other hand, an enterprising attitude to work is expected from the workers, leading to an extremely dynamic and flexible work identity. However, there are trade-specific and country-specific differences. Whereas the significance which directs regulations was more valid for example within the nursing field, it was extremely varying in the employment situation of the ones working in tourism. Furthermore, the character of assignments and work profiles affects work identities strongly. (Kirpal 2004)

The second interesting international study of professional identity has been done by Tara Fenwick (2006), who carried out a study in Canada into the new forms of work in which the

organisation or the conditions of the employment do not offer clear limits (e.g. rent work, agreement work, or project work). According to Fenwick the persons doing 'limitless work' actively built trajectories and limits concerning their own career and their identity. The longer they had been in the work the more comfortable they felt about change, their know-how and station. The workers continuously questioned the limits in the information foundation which specifies their work, and the kinds of identities they are identified with. They understand the strategic significance of the control and management of an identity for the market and in the organisation for managing. They were very aware of how to produce their subjectivity, and in the kinds of operation networks they participate. (Fenwick in Eteläpelto 2007:136.)

In these research results I see parallels with the cultural manager's profession. Many of my interviewees work in different projects, even though they are in the permanent employment by the same employer. They have got used to the fact that their daily work consists of many simultaneous projects, such as tasks in which the following project is outlined even though the previous one has not ended yet. This requires certain abstract thinking, constant new definition of one's work, and continuous learning.

Manuel Castells (2004:8, 10) uses the term 'project identities', which define the positions of individuals or groups in a society. Could professional identity in the information society be seen as a project identity? It would seem that the old professional identities are hopelessly outdated. The demands of work and the meanings given to it by the society change: one is in need of a project identity. According to Castells, a project identity gives birth to subjects who are collective actors. Many of my interviewees emphasise the significance of wide networking and the fact that even though they often work alone, they do it as a part of a network.

The cultural manager's profession is not comparable to the traditional professions such as a doctor's, cleric's, or lawyer's; there is no authority which controls the theory directing systematic work. There is no group of members standardising the internal culture, or even clear career development. The cultural manager's profession is not controlled by the society, either. Rather, the controller can be a financier, or the public, but it can also be the cultural managers' own network to which belong not only the other managers, but also the performers and artists as well.

## **The sectors of professional identity in my study**

In the following are described some sectors of professional identity which I have selected from my research material. In my study I have found that a person can confirm their professional identity according to

- education
- work experience
- work orientation
- work society: colleagues, employer, clients
- turning points of career or personal life
- values, norms, and ethical principles

The conditions of employment also affect the forming of the work identity, as do economic compensation, career views, basic education, and education offered in the work. Tension between the flexibility of the work and its continuity, the know-how demands of the work, and opportunities for the developing of the own know-how are important areas for confirming professional identity. (Eteläpelto 2007:137-138)

Next I will shortly review the main sectors of professional identities, with illustrating examples from my data.

### ***Education and work orientation***

I divide my informants into three categories according to their educational background. The first group is those who have a degree in cultural management (3 persons). In addition one person has taken a shorter course (one year or less) in management. The second group consists of people who have got a degree in fine arts (Master of Arts, majoring in music) or business education (5 persons). The third group consists of those who have no degree in a related field but have some other degree, for example in youth work, social sciences, or history (3 persons). However, it is difficult to say which fields are related to cultural management and which are not. For example, working in art administration one needs to know a lot about the structure of society. Yet I have made a division to show that the field of professional cultural management is very incoherent and it is typical that people

who work as a cultural producer do not have a specific producer's education, but rather have got their professional know-how by working.

Lisa has a degree in hotel and restaurant management and has worked many years as a hotel receptionist. At the same time she worked also as a cultural producer. Later, when she founded her own folk dance group and her own business she wanted to get a relevant education. For many years she had two or more jobs, and as a consequence, suffered from burnout; after her recuperation she got a new job and also began to study cultural management. One of the reasons for that was the wish to get peer support and a proof that she is competent at her work. Before taking the degree her method was that of trial and error. Taxation laws, for instance, caused problems. Afterwards she was very satisfied with the degree program, as it gave her the opportunity to meet colleagues and visit places that are usually off-limits (backstages, for instance).

Most cultural producers do not have a producer's education, and are self-taught. Thomas said he also got some good advice from his colleague:

*“The main thing is to have a very good CV. It's the most important thing! He showed me his own CV and after that I've used that model.”*

This might be the shortest course available in cultural management! Thomas has worked more than ten years in different music and theatre productions. At this moment he works in a project which aims to stop the social exclusion of young people in rural areas by using different artistic methods.

Paul has taken a short course (c. one year) in event management. He was very pleased with the lecturers, who, according to him, were the cream of Finnish event management. They also gave practical homework: one was to write a short handbook of one's event or festival. The informant gathered the basic information about his festival: its main idea, goals and purposes, descriptions of the organization, timetable, and information about event's important places and people and performers, as well as contact information and maps. Consequently in his organization the handbook has been used for several years after the course. Updating it is an important tool for the new voluntary workers and also for him. He found it very useful to write everything down, because at the same time he had to find out a lot of information as well. The writing process became a learning process. The

other benefit was peer support. Although many other students were from sport organizations, they had plenty of views and experiences to share.

Caroline was quite disappointed in her degree in audiovisual management. When I asked how well her education and current job as a cultural producer correspond to each other, I did not get clear answer. She mentioned the need of more classes on editing, financial management, and scriptwriting. At the University of Applied Sciences she had done shooting, communication studies, and business education. At that time she was not interested in financial management, and skipped those classes if possible. She felt that her previous projects had taught much more than her formal education. Caroline would have liked to get more computer courses and financial management. At the moment she is studying scriptwriting at an English university.

The general impression I got after the interviews was that most of the informants appreciate the education available for cultural producers but that they personally had not had the possibility to receive it, either because they have not found a suitable course or degree, they considered themselves too old, or they just felt that they have been working long enough to handle all questions regarding cultural management on their own.

### ***Work orientation***

Most of my informants have a high work orientation. Generally, most of them work more than 10 hours a day, and consider work a very important part of their life. Only Caroline stated she works only from 8 am to 4 pm - the normal workday in Finland - because she has a young daughter. Otherwise it made no difference whether a producer had a family or not. Paul said he tried to be “a good husband and father” when he got married, managing only one dance group. After one or two years he had several groups and taught dance courses around Finland. Susan, a 28-year-old woman, said that because she had no children, it was possible to work evenings. She told me that one of her colleagues has two young children and he has to manage his working times very carefully, especially when it comes to evening work.

The work of cultural producers juggles different projects. Many times one has to plan a next event or festival before the previous is over. Event planning has been described as a curve: first one has to plan it (ideas, marketing, information, cost accounting and so on) then put it into practice, and finally evaluate it. The most challenging part is usually the time when event is on the go: the working time can anything up to 20 hours a day. If the event or festival lasts several days, the cultural producer is challenged both physically and mentally, as he or she has to make sure that everything goes to plan. Lisa said that festival week is emotionally very intensive.

*“It’s an amazing feeling to see when all the planned performances and shows are realized. All the work which had been done during the previous months and weeks is actualized.”*

During the event the best situation for a cultural producer is when all work has been delegated to the other festival workers and he or she only has to overlook everything. When the event or festival is underway there is something to do only if there are unpredictable occurrences - and there always are: a performer or artist has cancelled, someone has fallen ill, or the timetable has changed. Then the cultural producer is the person to solve the problems. This is what makes the work very stressful on the one hand, but on the other hand, Lisa said; this is what makes the whole process worthwhile. Everything is possible when working with people!

Most of the informants admitted that their workdays are too long. Paul called himself a workaholic. Yet most have a possibility to have a summer vacation or a holiday before Christmas. Of course if one is organizing a festival held in summer (like most Finnish cultural festivals are) then one can have a vacation only after the festival, when the evaluation has been done.

Paul stated that he had not had a summer vacation for years. During the summer months he is performing with his dance groups, and training several folk dance groups which perform at festivals around Europe. During these visits he is checks out other dance groups and observes what is going on in folk dance and music, as well as networking with other festival visitors and performers. Very often he contacts the first-time groups and asks if they would like to perform at his own festival in Finland. These situations are often the first negotiations with new groups. Naturally it is very efficient to work and make new contacts while one’s groups are performing. On the other hand it means that these trips

are no holidays. In the Paul's view, folk dance, and leading the dance organization and a folk dance festival is a way of life, not just work. It would be impossible to separate his personal life from the folk dance life.

Lisa burned out because of too much work, and took more than a year to recover. Now she has learned to take care better of herself and beware of overtime. She told it was an emotionally demanding situation to admit that she is over-stressed and tired. Now she tries to avoid stress and haste but it is not always possible; sometimes all deadlines coincide and she has plenty of work to do. She works in a non-governmental organization and most of her workmates are voluntary workers or other people who only work evenings or weekends; thus they often have meetings in the evenings or weekends, instead of regular office hours. Lisa usually works normal day at the office, and has meetings in the evenings: quite easily she is working two or three extra hours. She can have extra days off or come to work later or leave earlier but in many cases it is difficult to arrange. Lisa likes to work at nights, so it is quite usual for her take her laptop home and continue to work after tucking in the children. Nowadays when her children are older they tell her, "Is there any sense in writing in the middle of the night?" Yet she likes to write, because the night her quiet and peaceful time.

Lisa is responsible for the management of a folk dance festival. Her main task is to find performers and artists, organize timetables, festival areas, and all tasks which include the management process. As the festival week approaches her workload keeps piling up; a few days before the festival begins, she almost forgets to eat. She jokes that her husband sees in her eyes when she is "in that mood". It means that it is no use discussing any serious topics as she cannot concentrate on anything else than work. Thus he needs almost to feed her or at least keep checking if she has remembered to eat.

When the big moment is at hand and the festival begins, Lisa is so tired that tears stream down from her eyes. Once again she and the production team have succeeded and the show can begin. She relates to her work very emotionally:

*"This is my genre and my field of work. It is so great to be here and work on this."*



My material reveals how conscientiously the cultural producers relate to their work: one feature of this is their intense work orientation. Paul admits that three big productions in one year were almost too much for him. After the last one he felt totally exhausted:

*“I arrive to work in the morning not later than 6.30 am and leave around 6.30 or 8.30 pm. Last year I worked all weekdays and Sundays, because I had so many big events. After the final event I felt like I’d run into a brick wall. It was so awful when it finished. Luckily my heart did not stop. One person must take responsibility to everything. They said: ‘you work with too little organization.’ I said: ‘No one replaces the director. Full stop. That is how it goes. One person has to carry the final responsibility.”*

None of my informants were thinking of leaving the cultural management field. Most had worked in the same organization for years. Susan said she would like to study psychology or psychotherapy but after studying, continue her work in the field of culture or arts. Some would like to move ahead in their career and change jobs if they found a better one; at the same time they were very conscious of the kind of organization or festival that would suit them. In my opinion that indicates their professional identity is strong and they are conscious of it. If a cultural producer had specialized in producing a folk dance festival, it would not be possible to produce for example a heavy metal or hip hop event. As Caroline said, the content of the project or production must be very good for her to work on it; she will not work with ‘fluffy content’ any more. In her case, good content means sustainable development, respect for the environment, and Finnish folklore and history. She would not work on projects she considers too commercial.

John, a 39-year-old man, related to his work rather lightly, mainly because the organization was quite poor, and could not afford to pay him a full-time salary; he worked part-time, although he had all the main responsibility over a whole festival, including economy and management. He worked only a half-time and got a half-time salary; therefore he said that he does not perform all the work on time, or to his full potential. Despite that, he would like to produce “the best event ever” and try to do his job so that his organization does not get any negative operating income. Thus although he had more work than was possible to do in half a day, he was willing to do his best. John is very loyal to his employer - or perhaps he is loyal to the audience and artists? He mentioned that in ten years’ time he will not be in this job; this is only a place where he can get more work experience. On the other hand,

he would stay if he received a better salary. In my point of view, his situation is problematic, as he lives with his family in an area of Finland where there are only a few jobs available for cultural producers. Having built a new house for his family, he had settled down to that area just a few years ago. Fortunately he also has another occupation working as a music teacher.

### ***Work society***

According to Eteläpelto and Vähäsantanen (2006:41), professional identity is based on and formed in those work communities which have been determined culturally and in the social situations in which the professionals live. The significance of the work community, according to my interviewees, is valid because in most cases, the immediate work community is very small. In the field of cultural management, at least in Finland, the work communities consist mainly one or two full-time workers' offices.

All of my informants mentioned their social network as an important part of the work. A cultural producer has to form relationships with people, organizations, and foundations, and this is easier if he or she is social and approachable. Personal contacts with artists, suppliers or media help considerably: it is easier to call a familiar reporter and ask them to write an article, than to approach a total stranger.

Sharon said she feels that her job is a very lonely one. That is the reason why she had worked very hard to build up a network of cultural producers.

*By networking we will get more power to this work, we will get more ideas and peer support, because after all this is rather lonely work. We all live around Finland doing the same work and solving the same kinds of problems.*

Finland Festivals is a collaboration forum for the Finnish cultural festivals. Sharon has worked for the forum, networking Finnish folk music festivals. According to her, marketing and information cooperation have given a lot of benefits to all participants. They have received more publicity, and solved similar problems together; the main aspect, however, has been to get to know each other better. After joining the network Sharon has found several colleagues whom she can call contact for advice.

Cultural producers also have other connecting links, such as the Finland's Cultural Producers Association which was founded in the early 2000s. Its purpose is to supervise

the professional field and its members' benefits. It also follows discussions on the cultural field and the general requirements to work in the field. Another important forum for Finnish cultural producers is the Art and Cultural Professionals' Trade Union (TAKU), founded in 1975. Of its 3000 members almost 1400 are cultural producers or work at similar tasks.

However, these organizations are more or less official networks and do not offer peer support, at least as much as the workers might need; they cannot replace every day contacts with other cultural producers. Usually students create a strong network during their time at university, but in the field of cultural management this has proved problematic. For example, a Master of Arts majoring in violin can find work as a cultural producer. They know many violin players or other musicians, but no one who works as a cultural producer. Establishing a peer group in this situation is not easy.

Of course, there are also differing opinions. Susan said that for her it was quite easy to come to a new workplace, because she knew almost all the network organizations and people beforehand, having worked in another art organization earlier. In a small city it is very typical that all art or culture people know each other very well and naturally this enhances co-operation.

### ***Turning points in career and personal life***

The significance of an individual's life history as a basis for professional identity cannot be passed over. I have highlighted that side by asking my informants about the things they consider most important about their childhood and youth, and also by asking them to choose crucial points and situations in their career and life - new productions, special festivals, new work places, new places of residence, marriage and so on. I call these 'the turning points' of a person's career or personal life. Sometimes it is not easy to separate these points; however, some of my informants did that quite easily. Lisa, having suffered from burn-out, has rethought her time management and values. Should work be number one in her life or are there other things even more important - such as her family?

John remarked that when they had children, it was time to move 'back home'. Previously he and his wife have lived around Helsinki, but did not want to raise their children there; they moved back to their birthplace where they had relatives and friends. However, in that area he has difficulties to find work as a musician: that is one of the reasons why he now works as a cultural producer at a folk music festival organization.

Alice got her first work training place during her studies at the cultural centre of her home town. Her experiences were so positive that she decided to stay in the field, and specialized to produce a Medieval festival.

***Values, norms and ethical principles which are guiding the work***

Professional identity represents to an individual the things that are important in the profession's operation. It includes values concerning the profession, the ethical dimensions and objectives. (Vähäsantanen 2007:157) For the cultural managers I also would regard as one central factor the society's general attitude, and the attitude of the culture sector and to the cultural workers towards the profession. This has also come up in several interviews, for example in talks about the financing which is granted to the culture field. A central part of the managers' work is to find financing for their productions, and includes numerous negotiations with separate financiers. The fact that the significance of the event must always be justified, excused, and emphasised is common to the negotiations. The significance of culture must be translated into the language of economy: numbers and trade cycles. Managers are often on the defensive, and this also shows in their talk about their own work. Such consciousness of one's work identity is required nowadays also in nearly all the other professions, for the evaluation of the profitability of the work and for example in wage negotiations. One's know-how, results, and objectives must be continuously documented and demonstrated. (Eteläpelto 2007:94)

An important part of the construction of a professional identity are the values, norms, and ethical principles which guide the work. These values and norms can be conscious or subconscious. If a person is aware of their professional identity, then values, norms, and ethical principles are conscious. These can also form a tacit knowledge in the work community which guides the work but is not spoken aloud.

Sometimes these values, norms, and ethical principles are the main reason why a cultural producer chooses some production or job over another. Caroline said that she will choose her next production carefully; its content must be of high quality and not too commercial.

*"I can't do "cotton candy"... in my opinion producing and doing should be a mark of quality. What is sustainable development? We have done projects in sustainable development and these projects should receive more publicity. Producers should have responsibility over what they do.... of course because of*

*lack of work, it might be difficult, but I personally regard myself as a little bit selective. They should be responsible for surrounding people... they should produce those things which don't argue against their soul and heart.... I feel that you just aren't able to work if your heart is not in it."*

In my opinion Caroline is aware of her values and norms. She selects her jobs and is strict about the impacts of the production. She admitted that when she started her career she was not so selective. This is understandable because for a young cultural producer it is not always easy to find a job and in many cases you just have to take what you get.

John felt that his task is to educate people:

*"...this isn't business.... producing marginal music and these kind of festivals, this is more like charity. You can consider this as spreading common knowledge. We try to let people know that there is also other kind of music to the kind they listen to on the radio."*

An executive manager at the folk music festival, John feels that one reason why people come to the festival is because they want to hear music which they cannot hear on the radio: Finnish radio stations do not play much folk music.

Paul who works in a non-profit organisation said that the purpose of his work is to gather families together, away from their homes. He thinks that nowadays people do not have hobbies, and tend to spend their evenings watching TV. He thinks that family members should have common activities and spend their leisure time together. In addition to working as a festival manager and executive manager of a folk dance festival, he is training several children's and young people's dance groups. Paul hopes that when they have performances, parents should come to see them. He also hopes that the sponsors and municipality's decision-makers would notice his work with families and children. His strong family values guide his work; he would like to keep the dance performances in theatre halls, folk dance houses, or festival tents. There has been talk of taking the festival to bars and restaurants in order to find new audiences. In his mind this not suitable for his festival.

How much are the values and norms connected with the cultural producer and how much with the organizations? Previous examples have shown that the festival manager and festival organization might have disagreements; in this case the festival manager's opinion prevailed. I think it is not possible to work against one's own ethical principles. If a cultural

producer does not stand behind their event or production, they are not credible; without credibility, it would be very difficult to find funding and to market the project. There must be a balance between the organization's and cultural producer's values. Alice working with the Medieval Festival remarked that in the first year of the festival they did not have enough time to sew the performers' costumes in an authentic way. Instead of sewing by hand, they had to use sewing machines, which goes against their standards. Since then, they have made all costumes using traditional methods. Alice thinks it is very important that all props, costumes, and products for sale are as authentic as possible. It is very descriptive of her dedication that she got her job as a producer of the Medieval festival, she began to study Finnish and local history as she felt she must have knowledge about the Middle Ages to be able to work efficiently.

The festival has also cooperated with museums and historians to find out what the town was like during the Medieval period. Every year they have organized lectures about the Middle Ages and hope that all voluntary workers, sales personnel etc. will participate. In her view, it is important that the townspeople get to know their local history. In that way, Alice also wants to educate people.

### **Concluding remarks**

In this paper I have looked at the ways a cultural manager constructs his or her professional identity and of the sectors this identity consists of. The field of cultural management is demanding because it is so heterogeneous: there is not one way to be a cultural manager.

In my forthcoming licentiate thesis my main research material consists of career narrations. My writing is still in process so I would like to hear of any ideas and thoughts concerning the different sectors of professional identity or the relationship between personal and social identity and professional identity. Of course also any other comments are warmly welcome.

In my PhD, I would like to strengthen the ethnographic approach. One of my plans has been to select three or four cultural producers and their organizations and observe their work more intensively, by for example visiting their organizations and observing their work there. In that way, I might get a deeper understanding how professional identity is

constructed. For that reason, I would like to get ideas of what ethnographic approach allows me to see that other methodology might not.

### **Interview material:**

*Alice, Cultural Producer, F, b. 1974*

*Caroline, Producer, F, b. 1976*

*John, Executive manager, M, b. 1971*

*Lisa, Cultural manager, F, b. 1966*

*Paul, Executive director, M, b. 1953*

*Sharon, Executive manager, F, b. 1965*

*Susan, Producer-artist, F, b. 1983*

*Thomas, Music teacher and producer, M, b. 1972*

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