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**Transition – The need of guidance and support of self-employed dancers at the end of their career**

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**Summary of the thesis  
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## Introduction

As this research focuses on the situation in Germany, some of the names and terms used may be unfamiliar. Some of the issues discussed only exist in German conditions and a number of German expressions cannot be appropriately translated. In the following text, terms of this kind are written in italics and have to be understood within the context. If there are any questions regarding used terms or the circumstances, feel free to ask via the contact details stated above.

In the context of this study the word transition means the process of getting from one job career to another as well as from the end of a job career to the step into the next part of life. On average the career of a professional dancer ends at the age of 35. This means there are still 32 years left until the official retirement age in Germany. At the end of their career dancers are often declared as uneducated and difficult to recruit by the German job agency (Dümke, 2008). Of course this is not a matter of fact but the problem is that the vocational education, which often starts in the childhood of the dancer, is not approved as an official occupational qualification. Some dance diplomas are accredited or the dance-education is finished with a university degree, but this is not the usual case.

The definition of self-employed or freelance-dancers, relevant for this study, is that the dancers worked the main part of their career on a self-employed basis. A purely freelance-career is quite rare. As most of the dancers barely have a regular income by a permanent position they have to cover their social insurance and pension fund themselves. Financial resources for potential apprenticeships or further education also need to be taken care of and this, while generally having a very low income (Poláček, R., Papikkoud, A., Casares, C., Murphy, D., Wolff, M., Bronkhorst, P., Lakso, S., Ide, S., Spence, S., Ovrebo-Johannessen, T. & Timmel, X., 2011). In the freelance-branch the percentage of dancers without a proper job qualification or a job-qualification which is state-approved is very high. Accordingly, they do not have access to further education. Despite the obvious need, there are very few guidance and support institutions which really focus on the special needs of self-employed dancers.

In this subject area there is a general lack of information and action, which is also found in science and literature regarding this field. For the employed-branch however, a diverse body of literature exists including approaches of action. The freelance-branch is often ignored within these approaches and if it is taken into consideration then mostly superficially and inconclusively. It seems that because of its complexity no one really wants to research the freelance-branch and change something for the better. One reason for this is likely to be the lack of available resources for this field.

The aim of this research is it to point out the need of guidance and support regarding career transition for the freelance-branch in dance, hence for self-employed dancers. Because of the big research gap regarding this field, various methods were used to tackle the explorative pilot study character of the research. Differences between the permanently employed sector and the freelance sector are carved out and comparisons on an international and national level are made. Biographical information of dancers and the outcome of an expert-interview were included and analyzed to explore the need of guidance and support. Concluding, the results are displayed in a model which focuses on the important factors of this transition type. The model could and should be used as the basis to offer appropriate guidance and support for self-employed dancers.

## The job market for dancers

The job market for dancers consists of different sectors which each have a different association to culture and art. The main sector of work for a lot of dancers is still the cultural sector, which is marked by too low financial support and corresponding austerity programs (Poláček et al., 2011). Following this, there are a decreasing number of permanent jobs and the number of self-employed workers is rising consistently (Haak, 2005). Wages and salaries are quite low and many dancers live on the breadline, or even below it (Bundesregierung, 2000). This insecure field of work therefore creates an enormous burden on the self-employed dancers especially. A lot of theatres do not offer permanent positions because of the financial risks, which in turn leads to an even higher number of self-employed dancers (Bundesministerium für Wirtschaft und Arbeit, 2004). It is often the case that dancers do not earn enough from one job alone and therefore have other jobs, partly in the dance-sector. These tendencies also reflect the general situation of the job market for artists which the dancers belong to, as it is scarred by a high unemployment rate and an uncertain job situation (Biersack, W., Parmentier, K., Schreyer, F. 2000).

If a dancer is working freelance, he/she automatically belongs to the sector of the (literally translated) *free job sector*. In this sector, a dancer has specific advantages compared to other *free jobs*, for example specific taxes do not have to be paid (Bundesministerium für Wirtschaft und Arbeit, 2004). However, at the end of the day these advantages do not pay off. Dancers mostly have to pay high insurance rates because of the high physical risk of their work. In Germany there is the *Künstlersozialkasse (KSK)*, an institution which operates between the insurance company and the dancer. It pays half of the insurance fees. However, a lot of dancers do not have access to the *KSK* which is probably, among other things, explained by overwork due to the high number of members (Haak, 2005). There are more insurance companies such as the *Bayerische Versorgungskammer*, but as is the case for most of these insurance and support institutions, the services are only accessible for permanently or formerly permanently employed dancers. Evidently, the job market and its development simply forces people to work on a self-employed basis because there are not enough permanent jobs (Poláček et al., 2011).

### Dancer: The job

The dance-related education of a dancer often starts at a really young age. At this time it is mostly not perceived as a professional job-education, but does form the foundation for the eventual work as a professional dancer. Only Ballet-Diploma or a university-degree is at most officially recognized as a professional qualification of a dancer. Those without this kind of certificate, meaning a large part of the freelance-branch, are classified as uneducated and difficult to recruit by the job agency. Skills such as didactical, methodological, social or communicative competences which are acquired when working as a dancer are simply ignored.

A significant feature of the dancer's job is that on average the career ends at the age of 35 (Baumol, Jeffri, Throsby, 2004). This means there are still 32 years to go to the official retirement age. By this time at the latest, dancers have to face a career reorientation. Most probably they have to do some kind of retraining or further education, which however has to be financed. For freelance-dancers, especially the ones without a state-approved job qualification, the situation is all the more difficult, as they do not get any financial support for

retraining or further education or they do not even gain access to it (Poláček et al., 2011). Accordingly to the high workload they have, dancers have high levels of psychological and physical stress potentially aggravating each other. Consequently, at the end of their career, dancers often have nervous breakdowns and burnouts in some cases accompanied by severe injuries (Wanke, 2009).

On a more positive note, freelance dancers are perhaps better prepared for the end of their career. Due to the permanent need to job-hunt, the step into a different career might be easier and the corresponding burdens better to handle. They rootedly have more self-determination over the course of their career. Nevertheless, the level of qualification/education remains of high importance, as it sets the course for the further occupational career.

An essential factor which influences the procedure of the end of the career and the transition is if it happens voluntarily or involuntarily. The dancer can either step out of the dance-branch purposely or get pressured to do so. Both cases have different implications for the future career path (Dümke, 2008).

### **Transition in dance – opportunities and problems**

It can generally be said that the end of a career is an important time in our lives. Commonly this step is associated with a range of fears and people often grieve about the past (Roncaglia, 2006). Yet the end of a career could and should be seen as an opportunity for something new or for a progression. A positive attitude like this would be a good premise for a productive career transition (Kerr & Dacyshyn, 2000). How the transition is experienced notably depends on whether it was the persons own decision to retire and how he or she was prepared for it. The needs that these persons may have in that situation should be served by offers of guidance and support. In some countries offers like this already exist and have done for a long time (Baumol, Jeffri & Throsby, 2004). In Germany some work in this area has been done in the last few years.

In 2008 the study *Transition Zentrum Tanz in Deutschland (TZTD): Projektstudie zur Modellentwicklung* was published (Dümke, 2008). It researched basic data about transition of dancers but focused on the permanent-employed-branch. The information and details about the freelance-branch mainly refer to estimations and extrapolations which, after researching this study do not describe the reality. Nevertheless, this 2008 study built the foundation for the development of the *Stiftung Tanz – Transition Zentrum Tanz in Deutschland (TZTD)*, a foundation which provides guidance and support for dancers at the end of their career since 2010. Besides the *TZTD* there are only a few institutions which also offer certain types of guidance and support regarding transition to dancers. Unfortunately, these institutions mainly focus on the permanent-employed-branch and the access for freelance-dancers is quite limited. If an institution and its work are accessible for freelancers, success fails because of the lack of appropriate information and regulations. A particularly appreciable example of an institution which does not fundamentally exclude the freelance-branch is the *Euro FIA* and its *Dancepassport Scheme*. This simplifies the chances for permanently-employed as well as self-employed dancers to get access to employment opportunities and adequate support in many states of the EU. In Germany one of the cooperation partners is the trade union *Ver.di* (Poláček et al., 2011). In other countries the need of guidance and support for dancers at the end of their career was realized much earlier. For example Canada, England and other

countries developed such resources, some of which over 30 years ago, and their efficiency is scientifically proved (Baumol et al., 2004; North, J. & Lavalley, D., 2004; Poláček et al., 2011).

Guidance and support regarding transition has to be comprehensive and must try to give assistance in as many fields as possible. This means that there should not just be psychological counseling for example but also economical consulting. Most important is that all of these offers focus on the individual needs and circumstances of each dancer they look after because every transition proceeds in an individual way. The accessibility to support for freelancers generally has to be improved or even newly created, as they have been neglected in most cases (Poláček et al., 2011). A best practice example for guidance and support can be found in the model of *Laufbahnberatung im Sport – Duale Karriereplanung* which is used at the *Olympiastützpunkte* (Olympic centers) for the assistance of young competitive sportsmen (Dümke, 2008).

Offers of guidance and support certainly need orientation and indication to consult and assist in a useful way. Roncaglia published a model in 2006 which contains the key components determining the procedure of transition. The model was created in a study with ballet dancers who already ended their career. The key components are listed below.

*Reasons for Retirement – involuntary / voluntary*

*Sources of support / types of support*

*Emotional states*

*Coping within & without*

*Floating resolutions – the Sequels*

The two components *contextual factors* and *personal resources* were added to the key components above. Each of all components has sub-categories but a detailed presentation is neglected in this summary.

As life and career transition of freelance-dancers also depends on further components, this study added two more freelance-branch determining factors to the model. To outline these factors as precisely and meaningfully as possible, the findings gained from this study, the results of a semi-structured expert interview and the biographical information of freelance-dancers were brought together and then analyzed. The interview was held with a former dancer whose freelance career had already ended. The analysis revealed the following two key components to be essential for the transition of freelance dancers. On the one hand the *qualification level* and on the other hand the *self-determination*. Adding these two components to the key components of Roncaglia's transition model, results in a transition model for the freelance-branch.

Against the background of the insights and results of this study, the following can be said regarding the need of guidance and support for freelance dancers at the end of their career: Due to the specifics of the freelance-branch concerning the level of qualification, the dancers have difficult access to offers of guidance and support in general, especially to those which focus on career transition. Accordingly, they have to be consulted at an early stage to encourage them to better self-initiative in pursuing fields of interests beside the work as a dancer, especially in relation to a potential field of work. At this point the factor of self-

determination also plays an important role. Freelance-dancers usually have a higher level of self-determination than permanently employed dancers. So it becomes clear that the personal interests and individuality of freelance dancers significantly influence their vocational orientation already at the beginning of their career which needs to be considered and encouraged with regard to a future career transition. Furthermore, the access of existing offers of guidance and support, those for general career support as well as those for career transition should be improved, so that dancers who have not worked in a permanent job for a specific time or dancers who do not have a specific state-approved qualification are considered as professionals, who can acquire such offers. Nevertheless, the need of early guidance and support regarding career transition remains. Even if freelance dancers get unconditional access to corresponding offers, the premises for a successful career transition are established along the whole career process, which becomes evident when you take a look at the characteristics of the freelance branch and its members.

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