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MASTER THESIS:

“WEB and ARTISTIC CAREERS”

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Pages: 90
Characters: 181.730
ABSTRACT

The thesis is focused on the impact of the Internet on the contemporary visual artists’ labour market. In order to understand the magnitude of the impact, a two-sided theoretical framework was built, composed by a literature review regarding the major effects of the Internet on society and an analysis of the visual artists’ labour market and hiring mechanisms. The triangulation of different theories was necessary, because of the unavailability of previous researches about the specific topic. It emerged that artistic careers are affected two main inequalities: geographical location and embeddedness of the hiring system in personal network. The theoretical analysis also led to the formulation of three hypotheses about the Internet reducing these inequalities and enhancing transparency. They were tested through the case study Wooloo.org, an online free network for artists to connect with art opportunities. Finally, it was possible to conclude that the Internet is impacting the art market allowing the birth of new sustainable services for artists, and it is challenging the issues of location and embeddedness, but does not achieve to completely eliminate these inequalities.
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1. INTRODUCTION

"This is a revolution, - says Hans Neuendorf, chairman of Artnet.com […] - I think 90% of the art business will move to the Internet."

In Paul Klebnikov, “Art’s Big Bang”, 8th September 1999

The art labour market always suffered from deep inequalities affecting the development of artistic careers. The art field has always been a pretty elitist and close market (McLaughlin, 1996; Stallabrass, 2003) and art is considered a risky business (Menger, 1999): artists are more often multiple job-holders, they earn less than workers in their reference occupational category, and, even though they have comparable human capital characteristics (education, training, and age), they have larger income inequality and variability. Despite this, there is no shortage of new entrants into the artistic professions. Abbing (2002) gives six explanations of why average incomes are low in the arts: the sacred value attributed to art presumes an irrelevance of money value; art market is a winner-takes-all market; artists are unfit for anything else and are happy to remain artists despite poor financial rewards; artists are orientated towards non-monetary rewards; artists are risk-taker; artists’ self-confidence causes them to overestimate their chances of success; artists are misinformed, and the market in general is characterized by information asymmetries.

On another side of this scenario, there is the Internet, a tool that from its birth, deeply affected organizations and individuals, increasing the level of complexity in the modern society. In particular, the Internet is considered to reduce, for its own nature, information inequalities and enhance transparency (McLaughlin, 1996; Stallabrass, 2003; Andersson and Andersson, 2006; Lampel et Al., 2006; Paul, 2006).

The paper focuses in particular on how the Internet, due to its intrinsic above-mentioned characteristics, is affecting the inequalities in the artistic careers development, answering to the research question:

*How is the Internet impacting the Art Labour Market Inequalities regarding the development of artists’ careers?*

More broadly, the paper aims to analyse the changes brought by the diffusion of the Internet in the peculiar field of contemporary visual art (Bustamante, 2004): in facts, the Internet not
only affected careers development in the art sector, but also art production, distribution, consumption and business modelling\(^1\).

The most suitable way to face these issues is the case study methodology. As Lampel and Shamsie (2006) argue in “The Business of Culture – Strategic Perspectives on Entertainment and Media”, “in order to fully appreciate the impact of globalization on the business of culture, we must begin with an understanding of the evolution of cultural industries from an organizational perspective. The organizations that produce, distribute, and market cultural products operate at the cutting edge of globalization.”\(^2\): starting from an empirical organizational case is the best way to fully understand the undergoing dynamics of the market. Thanks to the study of the website Wooloo.org, an example of online service offered specifically to contemporary visual artists, it as been possible to analyse the impact the Internet is having in this specific market. The purpose of www.wooloo.org, managed since 2002 by the artistic group Wooloo Production, is to bring together two different sides of the puzzle and facilitating their interaction: Artists searching for art projects and art institutions searching for qualified applicants for their specific open calls, offering them to take part in art competitions, social experiments or group exhibitions. The reason leading Wooloo’s operate is that the artists-galleries matching process has always been characterized by a high level of information asymmetries and embeddedness of the hiring system in the personal network. The service has been run till now on a free membership basis and has by now attracted more than 20,000 artists in more than 140 countries around the world, providing precious accounts about artistic careers and Web. Considered the dimension reached by the network, the Wooloo team is trying to implement a new sustainable and profitable business model. Therefore, Wooloo’s management is an example of how new managerial entities have been rising in the field and of how they have been managed and it allows on to formulate consistent conclusions upon the online management of contemporary visual art market.

The paper is structured in the following way.

At first, the methodology utilized is described (Chapter 2). Methodology explains how the literature has been use to build the theoretical premises for the research and which data have been collected. Both secondary and primary data have been used, and in this section the

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\(^2\) Ch. 17, “Uncertain Globalization: Evolutionary Scenarios for the Future Development of Cultural Industries”
sources for secondary data and the methods used for the collection of primary data – observation, a questionnaire, and a series of interviews - are listed and described. Moreover, in the methodology, the consistency and feasibility of the research are validated.

In a second place, the theoretical framework is outlined. Chapter 3 contains a literature review regarding the major impacts of the Internet on the modern society, while Chapter 4 consists of a definition and an analysis of the contemporary visual artists’ labour market and its peculiarities, with a focus on the offline hiring mechanisms and the connected inequalities. This last section allows, beyond the understanding of previous work in the area, to detect the most relevant issues about this labour market, describing the inequalities occurring in the artists’ hiring processes.

Then, the two theoretical backgrounds are triangulated in order to identify which ones of the several phenomena impacting the modern society consequently to the diffusion of the Internet specifically influenced the artists’ labour market and in which ways (Figure 1).

In Chapter 5, the impacts on art production, distribution and consumption are outlined. At the end of this analysis, the author formulated three hypotheses specifically about artistic careers and the Web, mirroring the expectations that the theory rose about artistic careers in Web. 2.0 era.

Figure 1 - The structure of the paper: how the theories are combined in order to detect the specific impact of the Internet upon artistic careers (Image developed by the author).

The hypotheses are the following:
Hypothesis 1: “The Internet is likely to push a re-intermediation process in the art management field, creating the context for the birth of new sustainable/profitable managerial solutions dedicated to the artists”;

Hypothesis 2: “The Internet is likely to make the hiring system less embedded in artists' personal networks and more transparent, facilitating the access for emerging artists”;

Hypothesis 3: “The Internet is likely to have a disintermediating effect in the art labour market, affecting the proximity with crucial market makers and challenging the issue of location in the art market”;

In Chapter 6, Wooloo.org case study is described and hypotheses are tested. Due to the specificities of Wooloo’s case, testing the hypotheses in relation to Wooloo.org allowed a generalization (Chapter 7) and, consequently, it made possible to answer to the research question.

Chapters 8 and 9 are dedicated to methodological and theoretical limitations of the research, hints for further development and author’s conclusions.
2. METHODOLOGY

This chapter explains the methodological process followed in order to carry out the research, ensuring the validity of it.

In order to assess the theoretical background, fundamental to set the premises of the research, an extended literature review has been carried out, to detect the most important processes, which have been affecting the society since the diffusion of the Internet. Afterwards, in order to delimitate the field of work, beyond the study of further literature on the subject – e.g. Ruth Towse’s analysis of earnings functions in art labour market or Joseph Lampel’s, Theresa Lant’s and Jamal Shamsie’s studies about cultural industries - secondary and primary data has been collected and analysed.

Secondary data allows resource efficiency and has potential for triangulation, comparative analysis and new insights development. Primary data, on the other hand, requires more human and economical effort but can balance the misalignment of purposes that characterizes secondary one (Hair et Al, 2007).

Data has been helpful also to design the section regarding the interaction between the Internet effects on society and the contemporary visual art market (Chapter 5). Considering the limited existence of specific literature regarding the impact of the Internet upon the contemporary visual artists’ careers development, the author triangulated the theories regarding the Internet and the society with the analysis of the art labour market, in order to extract new theoretical insights.

Important sources of secondary data has been the several researches exposed in “Artists’ Careers and Their Labour Market”, by Neil O. Alper and Gregory H. Wassall (2006), and the online database Pew Internet and American Life Project, which provided useful hints about American art scene, in particular the data collected by Mary Madden (2004) through her survey upon American artists and musicians online.

Primary data for the contemporary visual art market analysis, has been collected through a customer satisfaction questionnaire (Appendix I), run among Wooloo.org users to analyse the future possibilities for the website, in order to develop a consistent business plan. The questionnaire has been sent to the entire community through the newsletter that all the users on Wooloo receive weekly. The presence of a filter question allowed separating data.

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3 Even if this research is dated back in 2004, it is evident how the Internet usage has been increasing - and not decreasing - during time. Therefore there is no problem of over-estimation of percentages, while there may be a problem of under-estimation, but, taken in consideration the positive value of the results, their under-estimation would not invalidate the research but somehow give more strength to the results.
regarding artists from data from organizers and art institutions. Response rate has been around 1%, but in the calculation, death and double profiles are not considered. In total, 198 valid responses were obtained. “Under-contribution is a problem even in communities that do survive” (Beenen, 2004): considering this physiological problem of online communities, the results are to be regarded as valid.

Moreover, thanks to the statistical analysis software SPSS, a reliability analysis has been run (Figure 2): the alpha value is good, which permits to conclude that the items can be used to measure the variables in a consistent manner.

### Reliability Analysis among the answers to Q5

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cronbach's Alpha</th>
<th>N of Items</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>.790</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Reliability Analysis among the different answers to Q6

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cronbach's Alpha</th>
<th>N of Items</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>.839</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 2 – Reliability Analysis among answers of questions 4 and 6 from the questionnaire (Charts developed with SPSS).

Data from the questionnaire helped also in the development of the case study, explanatory of the phenomena described. Case study methodology is appropriate where research aims are to ‘examine contemporary phenomenon in its real-life context especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evidence’ (Yin, 1981 p. 59), as in this case. The purpose of this research is not to produce statistical generalizations, but to identify emerging tendencies in the field thanks to an emblematic example and put forward theoretical propositions, therefore the case study methodology turned out to be consistent with the author’s purposes.

Case study consists in detailed investigations that allow research to be conducted in their natural setting, enabling the researcher to get a richer insight into the field of study (Barlow and Li, 2005). In this case, the description of the case study Wooloo.org has been drawn thanks to the strict collaboration between the author and the company: the author, indeed,
worked at Wooloo.org for about 6 months between October 2010 and April 2011. That experience allowed the author to get to know Wooloo’s culture; to observe and collect ethnographical information about the company itself; to personally participate in the relations with artists-users; to collaborate in the development of the questionnaire, whose data is used also in this research; to help writing the Business Plan. Observation and ethnography have been the main data collection methods used.

Moreover, coming to theoretical analysis of the company, several theories have been used, including theoretical methodological analysis as, e.g. the metaphor extended analysis proposed by Albert and Whetten (2004).

In order to confirm the questionnaire findings, and to get a deeper picture for hypotheses testing, the author collected other primary data interviewing eight users of Wooloo.org (Appendix II). These interviews gave the author the possibility to better understand the intrinsic motivation for the use of the website and, consequently, the value that this service is bringing for the artists. The collection of primary data has great advantages compare to the simple observation: it allows the reconstruction of mechanisms that may not be visible from outside, the acknowledgment of motivation in a more transparent and collaborative way and they are more suitable when a specific focus is needed, as in this case (Bryman and Bell, 2003, p.362).

The author chose to administer semi-structured interviews, more suitable in order to confirm specific hypotheses, in this case the ones formulated thanks to theoretical research and secondary data.

The interviews have been administered online: the Internet, main character of this research, impacts also on the methodology. As David Beer wrote, Web 2.0 offers two significant opportunities: it gives free and open access to data and it provides a collection of searchable archives. Online people are actively engaged in reviling things about themselves through computer-mediated communications – a phenomenon called “Confessional Society” (Cooke, 2008). Moreover, the Internet brought economical and practical advantages in data collection: information collected tends to be more considered and correct, because the respondents take time to develop the answer; the replies require greater commitment and motivation to be

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4 The Business Plan has been consequently used for this thesis in harmony with the rules specified in the Confidentiality Agreement signed by the author and the founders of Wooloo.org.

5 Bryman A. and Bell E. (2003) Business Research Methods. Oxford University Press. (Ch. 15, p. 346): “If the researcher is beginning the investigation with a fairly clear focus, rather than a very general notion of wanting to do research on a topic, it is likely that the interviews will be semi-structured ones, so that more specific issues can be addressed”.

7
completed and “because of this, replies are often more detailed...” (Bryman and Bell, 2003, p. 506). In addition, online data collection is characterized by low costs, faster responses, unrestricted compass in terms of geographical coverage – which, due to Wooloo’s worldwide diffusion, is the main reason why online interviews turned out to be the ideal method for data collection in this case -, fewer unanswered questions and better response to open questions. The choice of online interviews is also consistent with the theoretical background of the research: the process of transparency enhancement the Internet is causing, theoretical root of this thesis, is allowing individuals to express themselves as never before, turning respondents into participants, co-creator of value (Cooke, 2008). Market research must begin to assimilate the culture and way of thinking of new digital consumers (R. Murdoch, cited in Cooke, 2008, p.572), and it is exactly what this research is aiming for through the use of online interviews.

In addition, the situation was particularly suitable because the former collaboration between the author and Wooloo allowed previous contact with the interviewees, limiting the problem of trust (raised by Mann and Stewart, 2000, cited in Bryman and Bell, 2003, p. 506) often missing in online relations.

The sample was selected in a random way among Wooloo’s active and participative users. The random selection of the participants is one of the premises for establishment of the trustworthiness of the study according to Shenton (2004). Eight artists, from different part of the world were available to be interviewed and their replies have been collected and analysed. The interviewees are:

- Silvie Jacobi, 22, painter from Uk;
- Krisztina Asztalos, 27, painter and gallery owner from Budapest, Hungary;
- Max Goodchild, 58, painter from East London, Uk;
- Hulda Hákon, 55, sculptor and painter form Iceland;
- Robert Johansson, 34, painter, installation artists and art teacher from Oslo, Norway;
- J.O., artist from Uk.
- C.F., artist from Brazil;
- V.A., artist and designer living between China, U.S. and Switzerland.

From now on the artists will be addressed using just the initials of name and surname. Some of them requested to stay anonymous, therefore they have been referred only through the initials from the beginning.

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6 The percentage of interviewees from Uk is higher, fact that mirrors the composition of the contemporary visual art market considered in this research. See Chapter 4.2.
Even though only qualitative research has been performed, there are several evidences that prove the credibility of the study. The trustworthiness of qualitative research is often questioned, but “several writers on research methods have demonstrated how qualitative researchers can incorporate measures that deal with these issues, and investigators have attempted to respond directly to the issues of validity and reliability in their own qualitative studies” (Shenton, 2004). As explained by Shenton (2004), credibility is ensured by the fact that well-established research methods have been used and that an early familiarity with the culture the organization participating in the research has been development thanks to the internship experience. The triangulation of the different methods (theory, questionnaire, interviews and observation) is a further element of validation of the research. Moreover the detailed methodological description enables the reader to determine how far the data and constructs emerging from it may be accepted (Shenton, 2004), ensuring the confirmability of the research.

Once the methodology is clear, it is possible to begin to contextualize the research through the description of the theoretical framework.

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9 “To ensure reliability and validity of qualitative research, it is helpful to use triangulation. [...] Researcher triangulation involves comparing the methods, analysis and interpretation of different researchers on the same topic. Data triangulation requires collecting data from several different sources [...] and comparing it. Method triangulation involves conducting similar research using several different methods and comparing the finding [...] Theory triangulation is using multiple theories and perspectives to interpret and explain the data” (Hair et Al, 2007). The method proposed in the present research includes the usage of different methods (interviews, questionnaire), data from different sources (both primary and secondary data) and the analysis of a wide literature review. Considered the novelty of the topic and the uncertainties of the analysis in the field, triangulation is the best way to assess the validity of this thesis.
3. INTERNET AND SOCIETY

In the 1990s, a rapid diffusion of the Internet finally became reality thanks to the development of low-priced high capacity information technology and affordable high-speed data transmission using broadband technology (Andersson and Andersson, 2006). According to the Internet World Stats, the penetration percentage of the Internet growth was, from 2000 to 2010, about 445%. In total, almost 2.000.000.000 people, one third of the world population, access to the Internet nowadays. From the practical point of view, the existence of such a huge network means the creation of a globally comprehensive and technologically reliable telecommunications system (Andersson and Andersson, 2006). It is natural that many scholars focused on the study of the effect of technological development upon society (DiMaggio, 2002).

In order to understand the impact of the new communication technologies upon the art world, it is necessary to have a clear overview of how the Internet affected the society in general, because specific literature about the impact of the Internet upon the contemporary visual art labour market is missing. Therefore, the theoretical framework described in the following chapter is essential because it highlights aspects of the chosen topic, neglected by the related literature, it helps to define the research goals and question, it helps avoiding repeating studies which have already been done by others and it guides the choice of methods to adopt, through a careful study of choices made by other scholars.

3.1. HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

The sociological studies upon media and communication started a way before the birth of the World Wide Web, with the upsurge of electronic media. Different schools of thought aroused (E.g. Durkheimianism, Marxism, Weberianism), debating whether new media were having a positive or a negative effect upon society, though agreeing on the impossibility to ignore the on-going changes. Later on, in the wake of technological progress, scholars offered a perspective about digital media: E.g. Technological determinists, who argued that the structure of new media induce social change by enabling new forms of communication and skills cultivation (McLuhan 1967; Eisenstein, 1979). The first scholar focusing specifically on the social impact of digital communications media themselves has been Daniel Bell, in 1977. He predicted the two main changes that would have occurred, miniaturization of technologies.

10 http://www.internetworldstats.com/stats.htm
and integration between technologies and communication (the so-called “Compunication”, A. Oettinger, 1978), exploring the dilemma that these changes would raise. More recently, with the birth of the Internet, M. Castells argued that the world is entering in an “Information Age” (1996), in which new technologies provide the basis for the formation of a network-organized society. According to Castells, the Internet, enabling the integration of visual, oral and audio communication, is creating new forms of identity and inequalities and establishing new forms of social integration. The Internet amplified the effect of traditional media, besides introducing further changes, which are described in the following literature review.

3.2. The EFFECTS
Basing on an exhaustive literature review, it has been possible to select a list of phenomena, interrelated and interdependent among each other, illustrative of the impact of the Internet upon society.

- Globalization
Globalization did not started with the Internet, but it has been considerably enlarged by its diffusion. The Internet contributed in shifting from a group-based to a network-based society, less bounded to geographic propinquity. Globalization has been defined in several ways\textsuperscript{11}. Among the others, a few representative definitions have been chosen:

- Globalization is the process of “reordering of time and space facilitated by action at a distance” (Slevin, 2000, p. 200);

- Globalization is “the process of strengthening the worldwide social relations which link distant localities in such a way that local events are shaped by circumstances at other places in the world” (Giddens, 1990).

- Globalization is not mere internationalization, but it “signals the growing interdependence and interpretation of human relations alongside the increasing integration of the world’s socio-economic life” (Webster, 2002, p.68).

Slevin’s definition underlines the fact that globalization is a process that is significantly

changing the relationship with time and space. Also Castells (2000) speaks about “timeless
time” and “space of flows”: on the one hand time is compressed and it is de-sequenced\textsuperscript{12}; on the other hand, there is the possibility to organize social practices simultaneously without geographical continuity.

Giddens’ definition brings the attention to the fact that globalization is about the worldwide interrelations of social relationships;

Webster introduces the issue of interdependency of economic relationships. Other authors have underlined this aspect, e.g. Tapscott and Williams (2006), who named the new economic trends ‘\textit{Wikinomics}’.

Globalization causes a series of counter posed phenomena of localization and cultural closure and valorisation connected to local realities, called “\textit{glocal culture}” or “\textit{glocal society}”. (LeG Report, 2004; Roudometof, 2005).

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textbf{Increase of Information Flow & Transparency}
  \begin{quote}
    “\textit{Text, images and sounds now travel at the speed of electrons and may be altered at any point along their course. They are as fluid as water and simultaneously present everywhere.}”
  \end{quote}
  \textit{Porter, 2006\textsuperscript{13}}
\end{itemize}

Increase of the information load and globalization are two faces of the same coin: knowledge, increased by technological innovation, makes more options available (Schilling, 2009), but it requires an adequate infrastructure to sustain the global flow of information (Webster, 2002). In a context where information is coming faster and quicker, it is plausible that the level of transparency increases – due to the multiplication of the information sources. However, receiving too much contradictory information at the same time is dazzling for the self-identity building process (Slevin, 2000). As reaction, people do not simply accept information as it comes, but they keep on comparing and even criticizing this information, in a mutually built discourse (Slevin, 2000). The Internet has a role also in the shaping of the identity, increasing the ability to negotiate and experience and the openness of the self. The increased availability of information also requires new methods for describing authorship and for distinguishing information from misinformation (Greene, 2004). Nevertheless, a self-defence mechanism is\textsuperscript{12}

\textsuperscript{12} The Internet permits operations lasting seconds in which past, present and future are mixed in a random sequence.

\textsuperscript{13} Cited in Hand (2008) p. 19
embedded in the information flow itself: the Internet is providing users with and a great interactive potential. The more information is available online, the more points of view people can access to, and they have also the possibility to participate uploading contents, commenting, and sharing.

- **Participation & Interaction**

The growing speed and easiness in communications moved the focus on co-creation, participation and interaction\(^\text{14}\). Globalization makes the interaction more complex, enabling the participation of individuals not having a common culture or background (Slevin, 2000). As Deuze (2006) point out, participation must be seen as a defining principle of the new digital culture\(^\text{15}\): the spread of networked computer and Internet connections caused an intense commitment in anticipatory production, open design, and also participation in political dimension. The increased level of interactivity is the main reason for the development of Online Communities, “*virtual spaces in which users communicate in an easy and inexpensive way across long distances, connecting with people with same interests, with regard to time distances*” (Plant, 2004). On the Web people from all over the world can create a never-ending dialogue, in which everybody has the possibility to participate\(^\text{16}\).

The issue of participation is directly linked with the issue of democratization. Modern communication technology critically raised the level of control in the hands of the audience, which is in this way transformed in a crowd of active users. The communication is no more unilateral, but it implicates a bi-univocal relationship (Slevin, 2000). The Internet created new opportunities for “*dialogic space*” (Slevin, 2000\(^\text{17}\)), where the recipients of the message are not just passive listeners\(^\text{18}\).

\(^{14}\) See Tapscott & Williams (2006) and Slevin (2000).

\(^{15}\) See also Hand, 2008.

\(^{16}\) Thompson (1995) defines this phenomena as “*publicness of openness and visibility*”

\(^{17}\) See also Leadbeater 2008.

\(^{18}\) The issue of democratization is one of the most debated: Dahlgren (2005) speaks about “*dispersion of public spheres*”, which is more and more destabilizing political communication system and allowing the engagement of every citizen; Thompson (1988, 1990, 1995), analysing the description of the public sphere done by J. Habermas (1991) in his work “*The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*”, claims that, before the rise of the Internet, the public sphere was not open at all. On the opposite side Zuboff argued in her work “*In the Age of the Smart Machine*” (1988) how new technologies can either automate, flattering the human skill level to a really low one, or informate, increasing the intellectual work and the dimension of reflexivity. Also Keen (2007) and Barnett and Sung (2006) discussed the issue of democratization, arguing that Internet is an egalitarian environment and it is acting for a sort of homogenization, but flattering the contents on the lower level.
The theories about the democratizing power of the Internet received a lot of critiques, because one of the most striking tool provided by the Internet is the power of the user to filter what to see, to create his/her own point of view, limiting the topics to be exposed to (Sunstein, 2004), which include also the possibility to choose not to be exposed to different opinion and to the democratic debate. These critiques sustains that the democratizing potential exists, but the kick-start of a democratization process depends on the organizational usage that the users make out of the increased information flow: consequently, for the purpose of this study, the Internet is defined as a “potentially democratic” tool.

Moreover, it is not to forget that more that two third of the world population is still not able to access to the World Wide Web, therefore it is not possible to speak of a universal participation (a phenomena called Digital Divide, described by Williams, 2001).

Anyway, it is commonly accepted the fact that users are exposed to a huge mole of information everyday, and they can potentially access all the different data and news they need, as J. Stratton (1997) states: “While recognizing the crucial limits on connection to the Internet [...] it is, nevertheless, a significant vector in the reinforcement of the global flows [...]”. The question wheatear the Internet is a democratizing or de-democratizing tool; it still is a question of central inquiry and research (Hand, 2008).

**Information Network**

The Network Society is a social structure that permeates most societies in the world, the backbone of the modern social morphology (Castells, 2000). Networks are not a new organizational form, but, before the Internet, albeit they were already regarded as a flexibility paradigm, they were characterized by difficulties in coordinating functions (Castells, 2000). If before networks were considered merely a utility, now the so-called Information Networks gained a central position in the society (Bar and Simard, 2005). The new information technologies permitted a new level of coordination, giving new life to the network as organizational form. The main effects underlined by Castells (2000), Bar and Simard (2005) are: 1) the ability of networks to connect valuable labour and territories enhancing performances; 2) the effect on power relationships, dissolving centres and disorganizing hierarchies; 3) connectivity, i.e. the possibility to every party connected to the Internet to be

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19 Also the American political scientist Hugh Hecl, in his seminal article “The issue network and the executive establishment” (in The new American political system, American Enterprise Institute, Washington D.C., 1978, pp. 87 – 124), argues that the proliferation of issue networks brings with it a democratic deficit.

able to communicate with any other party; 4) universal access, i.e. the possibility to have access to all network resources independently of the user’s physical location. In addition, 5) informational networks highlight the proliferation of information through the network itself (Marres, forthcoming).

**Disintermediation & Re-intermediation**

The traditional networks have been seriously threatened by the disintermediation phenomena, e.g. the possibility given by computer-mediated communications of direct interaction with the customers, without any intermediate actor (Flew and McElhinney, 2002). Some scholars do not see disintermediation as a positive process: cutting out the “experts” in every sector and allowing the masses to freely communicate among each other, create a society in which “one person’s truth becomes as “true” as anyone’s else” (Keen, 2007, p. 17), establishing a “dictatorship of idiots” (Keen, 2007, p. 35).

However, “the self-proclaimed general ‘disintermediation’ of markets hides new forms of ‘re-intermediation’, with new agents that have emerged from the digital environment” (Bustamante, 2004). Posting information online is inexpensive, so the enthusiasts believed that it would eliminate barriers to entry fields, but it brought to a restructuration of industries (Hand, 2008). As Charles Bernstein has explained it: ‘Authority is never abolished but constantly re-inscribes itself in new places. [...] Decentralisation allows for multiple, conflicting authorities, not the absence of authority’ (Bernstein, 2003). Also Paul (2004) claimed that “The Internet itself quickly became a mirror of the actual world, with corporations and e-commerce colonising the landscape”.

3.1. The DEBATE

The debate about the consequences of the Internet diffusion is far away to be over and it branches out in different directions.

Enthusiasts anticipated that the Internet would boost efficiency and increasing the social contacts - e.g. Anderson et al (1995), among the first underlining the potential of the Internet to increase possibilities to find jobs, access to education, build extended social networks and facilitate the creation of social capital by making information flow more efficient - while critics, e.g. Kraut et Al (1998) and Nie and Erbring (2000), suggested that the Internet might

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destroy social capital by allowing users to hide in their own artificial world or that, despite the information load increase, this fact did not induce a radical shift in the way society is organized (Webster, 2002). Aiming to study the impact of the Internet upon offline life, Nie and Erbring (2000) surveyed four thousand Internet users online asking how the Internet changed their lives: most reported no changes, but a high number reported declines in socializing and other activities. By contrast, analysis of offline survey conducted in 1995 and 1998 suggest that the Internet usage complements rather then substituting offline socialization (Uslaner 1999, Robinson et Al 1997, 2000b, Hampton & Wellman 2000, Cole 2000) and it sustains the already existing bonds in the community (Koku et al, 2001). Empirical studies, such as the analysis from the World Internet Project (Amichai-Hamburger and Hayat, 2011), confirmed that Internet usage enhance the social life of users. Again, DiMaggio et Al. (2001), after a detailed analysis of the available research data, conclude that Internet has no intrinsic effect on social interaction and civic participation. It tends to intensify and facilitate already existing interactions rather then creating new ones (Ortutay, 2011).

Researches about online relationship did not bring clearer results. According to Nancy Baym (2002), the rise of the Internet made computer mediated communication fundamentally social, but a characteristic of computer-mediated communications is also the limited availability of information about the participants and the low degree of trust in the information available. However, strong online relationships emerge, and they are not less significant just because they are not based on face-to-face interaction (Lea and Spears, 1995; Wellman and Gulia, 1999, Parks and Floyd, 1996): Parks and Roberts (1998) demonstrated how offline relationships compare to face-to-face ones were slightly less developed, but there were no differences in terms of depth and breadth of interaction. Also Walther et al. (1994) showed how the difference between face-to-face and computer mediated communication was statistically significant, but the magnitude of the difference was small: computer-mediated communication could be as efficient as face-to-face. On the opposite, Lea and Spears analysis regarding identity formation online raises doubt about the possibility of forming genuine relationships through computer-mediated communication (1995) and, in any case, bilateral transactions in the Internet are characterized by severe information asymmetries (Macho-Stadler and Castrillo 1997). Moreover Walther (1996) pointed out the risk of hyper-personal

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23 See also Parks and Roberts, 1998; Sproull and Faraj, 1997.

24 Byam (2002) speaks about “reduced social cues”: the information available in face-to-face communication deriving just from physical interacting is impossible to obtain through online communication.
interaction: users, basing their evaluation on the cues available through computer-mediated communications, overestimate the attractiveness of their communication partner and risking misevaluation.

One of the fiercest supporters of the positive effect of the Internet on social capital formation is Charles Leadbeater, theorizer of the “We Think” philosophy: it is an invitation to share, mass-collaborate and connect in order to create a knowledge that is better than the sum of the single individuals’ knowledge.

Other authors are not so optimistic in considering the Internet impact on society, e.g. DiMaggio (2001) who argues that, taken in considerations all the empirical evidences that the Internet provides significant benefits in communities with a specific focus, generally speaking the Internet has no intrinsic effect on social interaction, which should push scholars to understand the circumstances under which the different effects are produced. DiMaggio and Hargittai (2001) suggest that people already owning high human and economic capital will gain the highest benefit faster. According to this view, Internet will not enhance transparency and democracy but increase the differences.

A. Keen (2007) is a supporter of the idea that the Internet has a destructive impact on culture, economy and values. In particular he argues that the Internet is growing an amateur-loving mentality: audience corresponds now also to the authors of the contents online, eliminating the quality of the contents itself and “perpetuating a cycle of misinformation and ignorance” (p. 4).

Other scholars underlines how technological innovation increases the range of goods and services available to a society, and the efficiency of providing them, but sometimes it results in negative externalities. (Schilling, 2009). An example is the assertion that the Internet contributes to loneliness among users (Putman, 2000; Kraut et Al. 1998, Nie and Erbring, 2000).

As suggested by DiMaggio (et Al. 2001) the debate is complex, and the Internet’s effect on inequalities depends on the social organization behind.

In conclusion, it does not appear to be possible to generalize the discussion considering society in general, but it is necessary to focus on a single social/organizational field. In this case, the focus is on contemporary visual artists’ labour market.
4. THE CONTEMPORARY VISUAL ARTISTS’ LABOUR MARKET

To understand the impact of the Internet it is necessary to define and delimit the object of this impact, and this is the purpose of this section. This chapter is going to define and analyse the specificities of the category “contemporary visual artists” and its labour market.

As stated in the literature, it is hard to give clear definitions in the art field (Menger, 1999; Towse, 2006). The art field itself it is complex to delimit, due to the lack of a unique and commonly accepted definition of the profession of artist. Consequently, in order to narrow down the object of the analysis, the case study Wooloo.org worked as starting point and the data collected among the users have been used in order to delineate a specific environment for this research. As shown in details in the chapter, the existing literature supports the generalizability of the characteristics of Wooloo’s population, analysed through the customer satisfaction questionnaire, to the whole contemporary visual artists’ labour market.

In order to run a consistent labour market analysis, the author choose Tilly’s and Tilly’s perspective (2006), critics in regard of the previous main theories focused – Neoclassical, Marxist and Institutionalist – which, according to Tilly and Tilly, failed in the representation of, respectively, historical, cultural and economical variables.

Therefore, after delimiting the field of research and describing its peculiarities in paragraphs 4.1 and 4.2., the author focused in particular on workers, i.e. the artists - described in paragraph 4.3 -, hiring transactions and networks’ functioning – paragraph 4.4. -, features described by Tilly and Tilly as essential to develop a labour market analysis.

4.1. DELIMITATIONS: The Multi-Dimensionality of the Contemporary Visual Art Market

As stated in the literature (Tilly and Tilly, 2006) it is not possible to affirm the existence of a single all-comprehensive labour market. Labour markets are different and ramified (Jentleson, 2010): this statement is valid also for the contemporary visual art field.

This situation implies a problem of delimitation, not just for the current research, but also for all the researches in the art market field. Moreover, the work of Cole and Gardner, Marchionini, Teague and Pitts25 highlighted the importance of the researcher’s conveying to

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the reader the boundaries of the study, as a key element to enable the reader to transfer and generalize the findings.

Due to these features, it is necessary to delimit the research field for the current paper.

- **DELIMITATION #1 – Western vs Asian Market**

Previous researches (Jentleson, 2010) show the existence of a western labour market different from an Eastern/Asian one.

Western and Asian market are following two different trends: while in 2009 Western art market returned to the pre-boom price levels, Asian market prices, even though having reached their peak in 2007, were still, in average, at the highest level ever (Jentleson, 2010).

Since 2005, Asian major art hub, Hong Kong, increased its market share by 14%, while New York’s one remained stable and London’s dropped down by more then 50%. When it comes to modern and contemporary South Asian art, the yearly change in average prices sold in the West was practically the inverse of that exhibited in the East, an indication that there may be a substantive difference between the Eastern and Western markets (Jentleson, 2010c).

Primary data from the questionnaire mirror the differences deducted from the literature. As it is possible to notice from the pie chart (Figure 3), 84% of the artists on Wooloo are from Europe or North America. Africa is not represented at all in the sample (just one respondent is from Morocco). Even if, according to recent publications, China has overtaken the U.K. to become the world's second-largest art market after the U.S. (Reyburn, 2011), there is scarce presence of Chinese, and Asian in general, contemporary artists on Wooloo – probably, in the case of China, due to the strict laws of the Chinese Government regarding the use of the World Wide Web.
Figure 3 – The geographical distribution of Wooloo’s artists in the world (chart developed by the author with data from the questionnaire).

Therefore, the analysis focuses on European and North American Market, due to data availability.

The following chart (Figure 4) shows data regarding the dimension of European/American Market.

Figure 4 - The European and American art market economic situation. Source: Kusin & Company (2002).
• **DELIMITATION #2 – Every country is different**

In the art field, different labour markets exist in different countries, because the different national laws influence the art field in terms, for example, of publicity of the arts. An example is the already mentioned strict Chinese politics about the Internet usage, which is affecting the number of Chinese artists on the Web and on Wooloo.

Regarding the market considered in the analysis, in Europe the most significant art market is the British Art Market, with a global share of 26% (House of Commons, Culture, Media and Sport Committee, 2005). Also according to the data collected through the questionnaire, Uk is the country with the highest percentage of artists on Wooloo (26% of the European artists, 12% of the total, See Figure 5).

![Figure 5](image-url) – The geographical distribution of Wooloo’s artists in Europe (chart developed by the author with data from the questionnaire).

Regarding the dimensions of British contemporary visual art market, according to the Labour Force Survey, there were approximately 148,700 visual artists in the UK in 2,000 (including commercial artists and graphic designers). Other research, cited in written evidence from The Artists Information Company, quotes a figure of between 60,000 and 90,000 for the number
of visual artists in the UK. (House of Commons, Culture, Media and Sport Committee, 2005). The Visual Arts and Galleries Association estimates that around 45,000 professional artists work in the UK.

Denmark deserves a special mention because it is the environment in which Wooloo evolved. The Danish market is well described by Trine Bille, associate professor from Copenhagen Business School, thanks to panel data from Statistics Denmark. In Denmark, the total number of persons working in the creative industries is 34,405, but just 879 of them are independent artists.26

Regarding the Italian market, according to Istat (the Italian National Institute of Statistics) 25,000 persons27 work under the category “Painter, sculptors and similar”, and 56.86% of them are under 40 years old.

However, despite the above-explained geographical delimitations, artists are shown to be proactive: 32% of them show their work internationally (House of Commons, Culture, Media and Sport Committee, 2005). It means that, wherever the artist resides, his/her referring market is the global market. This data support the generalizing potential of this research and this is why, in order to delineate the characters of the artists considered on the research, data from all over the western countries has been considered. Data was mainly available from Uk, U.S. and Italy, therefore, even though the research considers proactive globalized artists, in case further analysis would be performed on the local level, it would be necessary to go deeper in the analysis of the differences among the markets.

26 The definition of independent artists in Bille’s paper is “Activities of individual artists”, which means that the category includes the artists considered in this research but also other artists, e.g. musicians.

27 http://www.istat.it/strumenti/definizioni/professioni/nup/datifol/index.php?id=2.5.5.1.1

28 The people classified in the category partially respond to the criteria defined in his research. In facts they are described as “researching about knowledge and artistic representation, creating work of art painting, drawing and sculpting utilizing different techniques, knowledge and artistic capabilities to supply services and commercial/artistic products or to restore art works” (translation by the author). Restoration of art is not object of this research, since it is not a category present on Wooloo (See Paragraph 4.3). Nevertheless, the numerical data are reliable and useful to complete a better description of the category.
4.2. DEFINITION OF VISUAL ART and PECULIARITIES of the FIELD

In order to delimit the category of artists this research in focused on, it is necessary, at first, to give a definition of visual art. Visual art can be defined as:

“All the art forms with a primarily visual output, such as ceramics, drawing, painting, sculpture, printmaking, design, crafts, photography, video, and filmmaking, or any form of collaborative product including this specific ways of production.” (Author’s definition)

The main conclusion gathered from this definition is that the output of visual art needs to be displayable in a visual way.

The artists collected on Wooloo.org are divided by interest field: activism, architecture, conceptual art, curating, design, digital, drawing, film, installation, intervention, mixed media, painting, performance, photography, printmaking, project organizing, sculpture, sound, textile and video²⁹, forms of art whose output is always displayable in a visual way.

In order to analyse the mechanisms behind the functioning of this market, it is necessary to point out two intrinsic characteristics of the contemporary visual art market that makes this case particularly interesting.

- **Impossibility to assess quality to the work of art**

Uncertainty and bounded rationality are rooted in the art labour market. Indeed, considering the non-utilitarian nature of the goods, it appears to be not manageable an objective estimate of the quality of artistic output (Caves, 2000, 2003). Artistic goods are experiential (Bjorkergren 1996, Hirsch 1972, Holbrook and Hirschman 1982), and it is not feasible to establish clear standards of judgement (Bjorkergren 1996, Holbrook and Hirschman 1982, Lewis 1990, Turow 1984): opinions can differ so much that it is even impossible to rely on expert’s view. There are no recognized specialists in the traditional sense of the terms because in this field tacit knowledge is more important then codified one (Jones and DeFillipi 1996, Miller and Shamsie 1996). The value and the appreciation of a product are typically decided after the experiential process by each consumer, basing on an indefinable balance of novelty and familiarity with the object (Lampel et Al., 2000).

- **Low value of training and certifications**

R. Towse (2006) included in her analysis, conducted from the Uk artists’ perspective, the value of training, talent, on-the-job training, experience, utility and reputation and she

²⁹ http://www.wooloo.org/open-call
criticized the applicability of Adam Smith’s Human Capital Theory to the art labour market analysing the earnings functions: artists do not seem to be wealth maximisers\(^{30}\), and, consequently, Towse minimizes the importance of certifications, schooling and specific training in the market. As a matter of facts, a high percentage of artists are self-trained – according to the survey conducted by Towse (2001), 30% of the people who declared to be artists did not received any specialist art training. A reason for this may be that the ideal of art evolved in the modern era from a mere decorative tool, to a “dialogue of problems” (Caves, 2003): students are now evaluated according to creativity or originality, and not skill or proficiency (Getzels and Csikszentmihalyi, 1976 in Caves, 2003), and learning by doing plays a very important role in the field (Menger, 1999). For example in Denmark 20.906 persons with a creative job function in visual arts do not have a creative education while, on the other side, out of the totality of persons with a creative education, only 35% have a creative job function (Bille, 2008). Therefore, data about training and certifications is not a valuable indicator.

4.3. THE CONTEMPORARY VISUAL ARTIST

It is finally possible to define the contemporary visual artists category from the ethnographical point of view.

Compared to the workforce in general, artists are younger, having higher educational attainment and longer period of training, but they do not manage to do so much paid work in the art, as they would do (Towse, 2001).

Regarding target age group, 33% of the artists on Wooloo are between 31 and 40 years old, while 21% of them are between 41 and 50 years old (Figure 6). Leg Report (Istat, 2004) confirms this data: the population of Italian artists is not particularly young (in average 43,9 years old) but it is to be taken in consideration that artists need different time and patterns to reach their artistic maturity and to be ready to display their works on a worldwide platform.

From the literature and the data collected it is possible to point out the main characteristics of the careers in this field:

- **Artists are self or short-term employed**

  Self-employment is one of the main characteristics of the category: According to the data available on the United Stated Department of Labour website\(^1\), about 60% of artists are self-employed; out of the number of visual artists in Uk declared by The Artists Information Company (between 60,000 and 90,000) nearly half of these (48%) were categorized as self-employed (House of Commons, Culture, Media and Sport Committee, 2005). 62.5% of Italian artists are self-employed according to Istat. Artists appear to be typically freelance and they tend to work independently or looking for short-term contracts and switching from project to project\(^2\). The industry is definitely project-based (Blair, 2001; Jones, 1996; Randle and Culkin, 2009). Long-term contracts are rare, and it is possible to observe the quasi-absence of

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\(^1\) [http://www.bls.gov/oco/ocos092.htm](http://www.bls.gov/oco/ocos092.htm)

internal job markets (Benhamou, 2003). The possibility for artists to easily switch from project to project and from employers to employers is defined as boundarylessness of careers (Arthur, 1996) and it implies both a great flexibility and a high level of precariousness.

- **Artists are multiple jobholders**
  The majority of the artists on Wooloo (53%) do not consider art as their main source of income, they are multiple jobholders and they search for new employment very frequently. It means that many artists do not work full-time on their artistic occupation. According to a Pew Internet & American Life Project research, 32 million Americans consider themselves artists, but only about 10 million of them get some kind of compensation (Madden, 2004, See also White, 2008). Moreover, it is necessary to take in account that an important percentage of the people interacting online are self-defined, not necessarily prepared, amateur artists (Bruckman, 1995), and they use the Internet as a tool of self-definition and self-promotion. As Bruckman (1995) stated: “Everyone is making things, there’s paint everywhere, and most work only a parent would love.”

- **Artists are self-defining organizations**
  It is necessary to clarify the notion of employment/unemployment in this field, since the occupational structure did not allow the formation of many regular positions, and the industry is mainly project-based. As Towse (2001) pointed out, in this context the level of employment cannot be measured through the numbers of jobs and vacancies; on the other side, self-employment cannot be considered as unemployment from an official point of view. By definition, self-employment is considered to be “a business activity that either yields sufficient income for the firm to survive or results in closing down”\(^{33}\). According to this definition, artists can be considered as “businessmen running themselves as their own business”, because they must finalize the artistic production to the market exchange, investing resources in preparing their own supply, promoting themselves, approaching agents and dealers (Codignola, 2010). Many people prefer to be self-employed – as in any sector of the economy – and, in the survey ran by the Craft Council, respondents underlined the importance to them to be “their own boss” (Knott, 1994). Moreover, since the labour is considered as heterogeneous, artists are imperfect substitutes for each other (Benhamou, 2003). Hence, the competition among single individuals is enhanced. Also accepting the

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Stevenson’s and Jarillo’s (1989) definition of entrepreneurship, artists can be seen as entrepreneurs themselves. Entrepreneurship is defined as “the process by which individuals - either on their own or inside organizations – pursue opportunities without regard to the resources they currently control”\(^\text{34}\). Indeed, artists act in unsettled and turbulent conditions, mobilizing resources thanks to their networking activity as self-defining organizations.

- **Artistic careers are risky**

  In the art field, “careers are understood as the series of discrete artistic or creative achievements an individual has been involved in” (Eikhof et Al., 2011). The time invested in these activity does not constitute employment time, and, in the end, artists result to be under-employed, meaning that they are able to obtain not as many hours of paid employment as they would do at the current rate of pay. Even though Filer (1986) refuted the “myth of the starving artist”, estimating the income penalty to be less than 10% in the artistic occupations, Wassall & Alper (1992) and by Throsby (1994) in their review of a number of studies, showed how artists actually suffer from significant income penalties (Abbing, 2002). Despite this, there is no shortage of new entrants into the artistic professions (Alper & Wassal, 1994; Throsby, 1994; Abbing, 2002). Abbing (2002) gives six explanations of why average incomes are low in the arts: the sacred value attributed to art presumes an irrelevance of money value; it is a winner-takes-all market; artists are unfit for anything else and are happy to remain as artists despite poor financial rewards; artists are orientated towards non-monetary rewards; artists are risk-taker; artists’ self-confidence causes them to overestimate their chances of success; finally, artists are misinformed, and the market in general is characterized by information asymmetries.

4.4. **THE OFF-LINE HIRING SYSTEM**

“For artists to sell their art, it needs exposure. Traditionally, the specialist gallery has fulfilled this role, augmented […], on the Internet. Online sales seem set to grow in importance […]. Fostering growth in online sales remains both a challenge and an opportunity.”

**House of Commons, Culture, Media and Sport Committee, 2005**

Taken in consideration the peculiarities above listed, it is possible to recognize the main

\(^{34}\text{Cited in Dubini and Aldrich, 1991.}\)
actors in the market and to draw a map of the hiring and networking mechanisms.

In this market, artists, producing visual outcomes, represent the supply side. However, the job of the artists is not completed with the production, but with the exhibition of their work to an audience. A symbiotic relationship exists between artists and the demand side of the market, each dependent on the other (House of Commons, Culture, Media and Sport Committee, 2005): “Great works of art may speak for themselves, as connoisseurs declare, but they do not lead self-sufficient lives. The inspirations of talented artists reach consumers’ hands (eyes, ears) only with the aid of other inputs—humdrum that respond to ordinary economic incentives. The visual artist needs a gallery to display and promote works to potential purchasers.” (Caves, 2003, p. 73). In practice, artists sell their accumulated skill and intellectual property, concretized in a visual form, for the sake of the project organized by the employer. The display of the artistic outcome is assured by the owners of galleries, exhibition spaces, schools, foundations and art organizations, but even companies and banks with their own collections (demand side). In every case, the demand for artists’ services depends upon the demand of final product. By definition, employers base their decision making process on productivity and organizational maintenance (Tilly and Tilly, 2006), capitalistic values opposite to the traditional romantic view of art production, fact that intensify the criticalities of the market. For the artists this system has a positive side, because focalizing energies towards the selling and prompting activities means taking them from the creative production phase (Codignola, 2010).

Given the fact that artists cannot survive without other actors finalizing the process of display and distribution of their works, the problem is how demand and supply come together.

Taking inspiration from the map drawn by While (2003), it is possible to design a simplified map of the art worldwide system.

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Every box in the map represents an internally connected network, that through critical nodes is then linked with others network to form a wider one.

In the map is shown how artists find jobs through the collaboration of other artists, friends or people they may have worked and studied with: information through the network are processed in an “informal way” and spatial concentration plays a very important role in overcoming complexities. From the beginning it is noticeable how “Labour markets are structured by social processes, not impersonal, disembodied market forces” (Blair H., Culkin N. & Randle K., 2003). As explained before, the value of the training in this field lies more in the aspect of network creation: employers may not trust official certification – because schools produce too many graduates even if not with adequate level of talent – but colleges “provide students with a forum for displaying their talent to the outside world in

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exhibitions, performances, etc., and enable them to develop networks, learn professional conduct and assess their own abilities"37. This means, as a consequence, that the investment in training may be ineffective without the right use of personal contacts (Blair et Al. 2000, Blair 2003, Christopherson and Stroper, 1989). The professional figures in the sector communicate among each other suggesting the best choices for every event and building the reputation for the chosen artist. After full-time schooling is completed, artists physically locate in some centres close to other artists and prospective employers (Caves, 2000). Geographical location is proved to be a very important factor in the market. The importance of this agglomeration process in the art field is particularly witnessed by the existence of places such as SoHo in New York or Montmartre in Paris. Thus, if the artist is successful, he/she enter the international scene, interacting with world-wide influential actors and traveling constantly as a freelancer, often working on more than one site-specific project at a time (Kwon, 1997). Typically, an artist, no longer a studio-bound object maker, primarily working on-call, is invited by an art institution to execute a work specifically configured for the framework provided by the institution (in some cases the artist may solicit the institution with a proposal). Subsequently, the artist enters into a contractual agreement with the host institution for the commission. There follow repeated visits to or extended stays at the site for meetings with curators, educators, and administrative support staff and for research purposes about the institution, the city and the exhibition itself.

The article “Artists, Commercial Galleries & the International Art Market38” by Fred Mann39, a professional gallery director, on the Visual Artists Ireland website is particularly emblematic about how demand a supply meet in the art labour market:

“Galleries find artists through a number of ways […]:

1. Through other artists. Most galleries listen intently to what their existing artists think as they are building a mutually supportive stable of artists.

2. Degree shows […] with a focus on particular colleges and institutions.

3. Particular selected shows. […]


38 http://visualartists.ie/resources/infopool-2/professional-pathways/art-market/

39 www.fred-london.com
4. Group exhibitions. Younger galleries often curate group shows by young artists. More established galleries often watch these shows to see who is up and coming. It is easier to become included in a group show rather than getting a solo show.

5. Through the press. Getting reviews or your works mentioned in any kind and every kind of magazine is a huge help as the art world reads copiously.”

On the other side, artists also use non-orthodox methods: Mann suggests them to collect the more information they can about the galleries they propose their work, to visit personally the galleries for several times before trying to start a commercial relationship and to follow up personally or by phone (White, 2009). “The art world is a large and varied place, and showing up and showing your face is important”, Mann says.

It is clear that the market is currently based on face-to-face interaction or mediated interaction through “traditional” communication technologies: the communicators new each others and they are involved in a one to one interaction. This aspect is also helped by the fact that the art field is characterized by the high personalization of every operator: not just artists represent individual businesses, but also other entities, even if collective, are often run in an individualized way (Codignola, 2010).

In conclusion, it is possible to affirm that the system is based on personal networks, i.e. “all those persons with whom an entrepreneur (in this case, the artist/the gallerist) has direct relations” (Dubini and Aldrich, 1991, p. 307).

4.5. PROBLEM FORMULATIONS: UNCERTAINTIES and INEQUALITIES in VISUAL ARTISTS HIRING SYSTEM

According to a simplistic view of labour markets, employers look for the cheapest worker, assuming a required level of human capital, and workers search for the highly rewarded job that matches their level of human capital. This view does not take in consideration several elements, and in particular information inequalities, present in every labour market, that do not allow workers and employers to access the complete range of information regarding, respectively, available positions and available workers. In the contemporary visual art market, the intrinsic characters of the field itself, mentioned in Paragraph 4.2 - impossibility to assess the quality of the works in an objective way and low value of training and qualification – are source of information inequalities. Ironically, inequalities in this field are lead not by asymmetrical information, but by symmetrical ignorance, due to the impossibility to know in
advance the quality of the product and its effect on the market (Caves, 2003).

As a consequence, from the occupational point of view, the art sector is affected by high rates of under- and unemployment, artists are more often multiple job holders and earn less than workers in their reference occupational category, given a comparable human capital level (Menger, 1999).

In particular, from the theoretical analyses it emerges how inequalities in the contemporary visual art labour market regarding hiring system and careers development are especially connected with two features:

- **Embeddedness**

  The current offline hiring system in the visual artists’ labour market is mainly effected by informal mechanisms, such as conversation and recommendations within the industry (Eikhof et Al., 2011), a nexus of ties between firms involved in the different parts of the production process and between the many employers who draw from the artistic labor pool (Menger, 1999). Artists need to actively build up their own network utilizing personal contacts (Eikhof et Al., 2011, Eikhof and Haunschild 2006, 2007; Grugulis and Stoyanova 2009; Jones and DeFilippi, 1996; Jackson 1996; Randle and Culkin, 2009). As a matter of fact, 78% of the artists surveyed in the UK recognize networking as a core element in their practice (A-n memorandum, House of Commons, Culture, Media and Sport Committee, 2005). The issue of embeddedness puts artists under a significant pressure from the economical point of view, taken in consideration also the fact that, traditionally, the relationship artists/galleries is unpaired (Leg Report, Istat, 2005; Rebecca Salter’s memorandum – House of Commons, Culture, Media and Sport Committee, 2005, p.29). Related to this face-to-face social issue, is the lack of transparency in this field, as stated by Gill (2002) in his analysis about women discrimination in project-based industries. The scholar defines the cultural field using the expression “clubby athmosphere”, emblematic on the situation of inequality embedded in the industry, which, since from the earliest years, have been related to luxury, and that flourished thanks to the indirect moral and political utilities40. Therefore, artists who happened to be outside the network of contacts, are penalized.

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- **Spatial Concentration**

“An effective way to overcome the complexities of the disintegration of the production process is to rely on spatial concentration” (Menger, 1999, p. 549). Even though the art scene is becoming more and more international, the processes are global, and artists are proactive, mechanisms inside the market are considered to be locally mediated (Peck, 1996; Blair, 2003). “Access and proximity to influential art makers are crucial for an artist seeking to build a national or international reputation”⁴¹ (While, 2003, p. 252), because concentration permits to overcome the complexities of personal networking. Therefore, artists who happened to be outside the cultural centres, are penalized.

Miller and Shamsie (1999) highlighted the importance of specific uncertainties’ identification in the analysis of a specific market, especially focusing on the sources of these uncertainties (Dempster, 2006). In particular Miller and Shamsie (1999) focused on three levels of analysis - industry specific/environmental level, organizational level, and individual level – and they argue the strong interdependence among the levels. In this case, the intrinsic characteristics of the sector, the impossibility to assess the quality of products and the low value associated with training and certification (environmental level) increase the importance of personal networking and spatial concentration (organizational level), which are the main features that characterize the processes of selection as unequal (individual level) (See Figure 8).

![Environmental Level: Impossibility to assess the quality of products and low value of training and certifications](image)

![Individual Level: Unequal process of selection](image)

![Organizational Level: Personal networking and spatial concentration](image)

Figure 8 – Analysis for uncertainties identification: the interaction among environmental level, individual level and organizational level (image developed by the author).

⁴¹ See also Bowness 1989 and Crane 1987.
This process is affecting the contemporary visual art market and making difficult for emerging artists to enter the labour market successfully, favouring artists already belonging to specific networks.

After describing the functioning of the contemporary visual art market, the main actors and the crucial characteristics – embeddedness and spatial concentration -, it is possible to proceed through the analysis of the art – Internet relation.
5. IMPACT ON THE ART WORLD

As M. A. Einhorn (2003) states, “the potential for the digital broadband networks to facilitate greatly the dispersal of art, literature and entertainment is considerable”, but, whereas business and entertainment industries moved quickly towards new organizational forms in order to adapt to the new situation, the visual art scene moved cautiously. The Art - Internet relationship has been contentious from the beginning, characterized by the suspicion felt by the supporters of the archaic and elitist artistic practices, which could never accept the democratic potential of the Net (McLaughlin, 1996, De Mul, 2009). In particular, mistrust of the medium easy accessibility, limitations in scale and size and audience-expanding interactivity are the main reasons for the slow adaptation process (Nowlin, 1995). Especially in the last motivation it is clearly visible an element of elitism “involved in the reluctance to put images of priceless works of art online” (McLaughlin, 1996).

Even though more slowly then other sectors, the art market is actually adapting to the new Internet-shaped society. In this chapter, the findings from further theoretical analysis are exposed, following the so-called “Funnel Approach” (Hair et Al, 2007): the chapter gives an overview about three macro-areas – art production, distribution and consumption - mainly affected by the phenomena listed in the Chapter 3., in order to narrow the focus on how and how much the Internet is affecting the complexities pointed out in paragraph 4.5.

5.1. CREATIVITY AND PRODUCTION

“The Internet to a large extent allows artists to circumvent the traditional art system (with its venues, curators, collectors and critics). In the online world, the (physical) Gallery/museum context doesn’t necessarily work as signifier of art status. Potentially, the Internet also allows access to a greater audience for an artist.”

Interview with Christiane Paul,

Curator for the Whitney Museum of American Art 42

Historically, the first use that the art world reserved to the Internet has been the invasion of the Net with every kind of artistic attempt and promotion. The second and more specific use has been the direct production of art online, even if it is really difficult to draw the limits of

what can be considered Online Art. The technological premises for the creation of Online Art can be regarded as the hugest impact the Internet had on art production. According to Stallabrass’ definition, the first characteristic of Online Art is to be made specifically for the online environment: digital technology is not a mere fact of reproduction, but also becomes an important mean of production.

Artists are the actors in the field that welcomed digitalization much warmly. Indeed, “Artists [...] have always been mobile” and interested not just in purely artistic creativity, but also in scientific and technical experiments (Andersson and Andersson, 2006). According to Madden’s survey, 52% of all online artists - and 59% of paid online artists - state they get ideas and inspiration for their work from searching online.

Nowadays the Internet can be seen as a playground for amateur artists creating semi-published work (Bruckman, 2002). For example, American artists have embraced the Internet as a creative and inspiration-enhancing workspace where they can communicate, collaborate, and promote their work. They are considerably more wired than the rest of the American population. The artists’ tendency to use the Internet more then the rest of the population is confirmed by Madden’s researches (2004): more than three-quarters of all artists, 77% - and 83% of paid artists - use the Internet, while, considering the total of US population, this data reduces to 63% (Madden, 2004). Artists are represented in every area of network activity: electronic mailing lists (e.g. the Chat list at Art on the Net); newsgroups (e.g. alt.art.marketplace); gopher (e.g. the Smithsonian and the Princeton University Art Museum gopher servers); Internet Relay Chat (e.g. the several OTIS collaborative projects) and the World Wide Web. The rapidly accelerating network presence of museum professionals, arts spokespersons, and artists has profound implications for art and its audiences as well as for communication technology and its consumers (McLaughlin, 1996).

The Internet affects art production also changing the way to interact: if the traditional communication technologies, like radio and television, allowed a unilateral communication, and the telephone permits a one to one flow, the Internet, beside enlarging the range of possibilities in the already mentioned unilateral and one to one flows, creates a many to many communication domain (Slevin, 2000; Thompson, 1995). Internet artworks no longer refer to the concept of a finalized object, but rather to a dynamic process, a collective (participation), open and interactive device: consequently, artists need hybrid skills (Fourmentraux, 2006).

Collaborative projects are now more diffused then ever. The new level of interactivity and

http://www.otis.edu/community_engagement/projects/laton.html
participation permitted the art world to branch out in different fields, e.g. undertaking initiatives with political purposes\textsuperscript{44}. The same democratizing process is happening inside the art world itself: if before there were few actors in the field, whose opinions were influencing the whole system, now the process of “democratization” is improving users’ possibility to express his own opinion and present it as the leading one, and “users’ abilities to develop high-quality new products and services for themselves are improving radically and rapidly” (Von Hippel, 2005).

Wooloo itself started exactly as a collaborative project, whose intent was to bring together people in direct relationship in order to create an art community and exchange thoughts, projects and ideas. The Internet is opening up new opportunities for dialogue and deliberation, empowering people to get things happen (Slevin, 2000, p 47), but at the same time, creating new uncertainties (Castells, 1998; Zuboff, 1988; Slevin, 2000).

5.2. DISTRIBUTION

As pointed out in Paragraph 4.4., intermediaries are both necessary for a career birth and development in the art world and, at the same time, very powerful to decide the destiny of these careers, because of embeddedness and spatial concentration. Nowadays, on the contrary, “Anyone with access to a networked computer can put work on the Net without the say-so of an art institution, and anyone with access to a networked computer can, in principle, take a look”, Stallabrass explains (2003).

Regarding the traditional distribution system, mainly formed by art dealers and galleries, the Internet increased the size of the markets as well as the right to access to culture and communication, and provoked a fall in the barriers to entry in each sector, with more competition by new actors and, correlatively on the demand side, a drastic reduction of prices (Vetraino-Soulard, 1998). The distribution art system had to adapt, as it always did historically, to the need of the upper class, both capable and willing to pay for the artists outcome (Andersson and Andersson, 2006): in the Information Society, the upper class is spending online, so the art distribution system had to deal with the World Wide Web as a distribution tool. Therefore, even if the traditional network of distribution has been seriously

\textsuperscript{44} An example of the successful collaboration between art and communication are the initiatives undertaken by European NGOs and European commission in order to increase access to information in the Soviet Union in the early 1990s and to ease the opening of international borders (Greene, 2004). A practical example of the social responsibility net artists undertaken is the work of Vuk Cosic, an artist, born in Belgrade in 1966 well known for his ground-breaking work and a pioneer of the Net.Art, art that uses the Internet as its medium and that cannot be experienced in any other way. (Stallabrass, 2003; Greene, 2004)
threatened by the disintermediation phenomena, art dealers are reacting, changing their way to organize work. An example among the others, from an article on TheArtNewspaper.com (Speigler, 2004):

“A third-generation art dealer, Mr [Serge] Ziegler, closed his six-year-old Zurich gallery in March 2003, frustrated with having to pay rent for a space where he rarely spent much time [...] he posted a digitised version of his inventory online, placed the works themselves in storage and hit the road. [...] Mr Ziegler says, 15 months later. ‘To suit the works of artists [...] I’d need a place with 20-foot ceilings. And it would not help me sell more works to my clients in places like Brazil and New Zealand’”.

Gallerists are now self-defining “galeriste sans galerie” (Vanessa Suchar, Londoner gallerist): they closed down traditional gallery spaces, cutting costs - rent, phone, logistics - and they are arranging temporary galleries/exhibition all around the world or completely new form of virtual galleries, phenomena of re-intermediation. Digital technologies allow a reduction in the costs of content creation and services, which might permit a democratization and expansion of creativity and expression. Re-intermediation is also manifest in other interfaces born on the Internet, e.g. Wooloo itself: these interfaces are pre imposed, but not controlled, they are developed for free mass participation (Bustamante, 2004). Artists seem to appreciate the new trend. Empirical data shows that 30% of all online artists and 45% of paid online artists say the Internet is important in helping them creating and/or distributing their art (Madden, 2004). The South African videomaker Minnette Vari, commenting about Mr Ziegler’s move, asserted: “The geography as well as the identity of Serge’s practice, has just become more liquid, more adaptable, more agile […] For me, this means that Serge can be more involved in my different projects; he is more free to move around and support me at art events around the world”.

However, the situation creates new uncertainties, e.g. in contracts and agreements drafting.

In addition, The Internet subverted the perception of space and time, with the abolition of waiting time, except for the few loading seconds, and the ability to quickly move from page to page from a single terminal. For the art distribution point of view, this phenomena has two consequences:

- On the one hand, it allows all the actors to be connected and ease the exchange of information and ideas;
- On the other hand, considering that art has always been based on the values of
originality and uniqueness, provoked a huge crisis connected with the fact that it is no more crucial to be, e.g. in the Louvre Museum, Paris, to know how the “Monnalisa” by Michelangelo looks like.

The art world is reacting trying to exploit this new potential. A clear example is the Google Art Project⁴⁵: whether people do not feel any more the necessity to go in museum, Google brought museums in people houses, stimulating curiosity and trying to induce them to visit the physical version. The Internet, is threatening the so-called agglomeration economies, which art distributors always benefitted of (Andersson and Andersson, 2006), for example collectors’ interest and money are now focusing on artists able to be international and events with a worldwide impact – Biennals or fairs – rather then on local exhibitions (Spiegler, 2004).

It is undeniable that the great advantage of the Net lies in its disintermediating/re-intermediating power, the ability of cutting through the traditional system and the media dissemination.

5.3. CONSUMPTION

Regarding consumption, “the growth and increased flexibility of what is on offer, the lower prices and the internationalization of markets are all factors that ought to work in favour of consumers or citizens, of their right to access a plural and open culture and information” (Bustamante, 2004 p.809). The new situation is based on growing (but still minority) horizontal segmentation on the international level, limited by cultural and linguistic factors (Garnham, 1999). It means that the market is wider but more segmented. Indeed, globalization is acting also on the consumption side: artists and galleries do not have anymore a local untouchable monopoly, but they have to relate and compete with realities from all over the world.

Beyond the fact that the audience is now enlarged, also the way people approach art is changing online: “scanning is rapidly replacing reading”, M. Speigler (2004) states in an article on The ArtNewspaper.com. Moreover, the so-called “Cult of Amateur”, blamed by A. Keen (2007), permits everybody to express his own opinion and become a critic himself, making impossible to understand which opinions are led by real expertise behind. The digital medium potentially allows an increased public involvement in the curatorial process, a “public curation” that promises to construct more “democratic” and participatory forms of

⁴⁵ http://www.googleartproject.com/
Filtering (Paul, 2006).

Also commercialization of the online contents is a very controversial issue: on the one hand, the Internet is one of the main tools of globalized capitalism; on the other hand, it is clear how it enables transparency also in the commercial field, easily allowing price comparison and customers’ review (Stallabrass, 2003). Many sociologists feared that the extended accessibility would “massify” the taste of the consumers and kill the art production (Shils, 1963; Barnett and Sung, 2006), but actually early observers such as Barlow (1996) underlined how new technologies opened up new creative energies.

In the end, the consumption network (Andersson and Andersson, 2006) is being affected also by the displacement of agglomeration economies, reducing the variable and marginal costs of transportation of art works from producer to the consumer: it means that now consumers, with the same investment can access a much wider pool of purchase possibilities.

Figure 9 summarizes the findings from the triangulation between the literature review about the Internet and society and the segments of the art world, production, distribution and consumption.

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46 See also George Ritzer, supporters of the theory of McDonaldization of Society (http://www.georgeritzer.com/)
### FINDINGS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>GLOBALIZATION</th>
<th>INFO. LOAD AND TRANSPARENCY</th>
<th>PARTICIPATION AND INTERACTION</th>
<th>DISINTERMEDIATION AND REMEDIATION</th>
<th>INFO. NETWORK</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Possibility to connect to other artists all over the world</td>
<td>Competition more transparent</td>
<td>Birth of Net Art</td>
<td>Possibility for everybody to show his/her own work</td>
<td>Increased worldwide online collaboration (connectivity and universal access)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Possibility for artists to promote their work internationally</td>
<td>Threaten to uniqueness value</td>
<td>Collaborative projects</td>
<td>Opposition to mainstream art</td>
<td>Establishment of Net Art as real form of art thanks to the network ability to cut traditional power relations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lowered power of agglomeration economies: artists can connect to the art scene even if outside the physical cultural centers</td>
<td>Democratization</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| DISTRIBUTION | | | | |
| Development of a worldwide wider market | More project from "the bottom" | Disruption of traditional market system | Network expansion |
| Worldwide competition | Different perception of time and space that allows different interaction timing | Organizational changes: birth of new online realities to substitute traditional galleries | Less face-to-face interaction |
| Lowered power of agglomeration economies: for distributors outside cultural centers is easier to connect with artists and other distributors | Stronger Competition | | Increased flexibility in the definition of what is an offer |
| "Galerists sans galerie" | | | |
| Hyper segmentation of the audience | | | |

| CONSUMPTION | | | | |
| Bigger purchase pool | Lower prices | Organizational changes made available for customers new realities different from the mainstream traditional ones to consume art | Plurality and openness of culture |
| Increased commercialization | Public curatorial practices | | |
| Trans-nationalization of culture | | | |
| Reduction of transportation costs | | | |
| Lowered power of agglomeration economies: the consumption of art is not limited anymore to cultural centers | | | |

Figure 9 – Summarizing chart: The effects of the Internet on art production, distribution and consumption (chart developed by the author).
5.4. ARTISTS’ CAREERS: HYPOTHESES FORMULATION

Taken in consideration the important effects on art production, distribution and consumption, which are the effects of these phenomena on artistic careers?

Basing on the theoretical background above presented, the author formulated three hypotheses regarding the connection between artistic career patterns and the Web. As pointed out in Chapter 4.5., the contemporary visual art market is characterized by the embeddedness of relationships in artists’ personal network and by the issue of spatial concentration. According to the findings above described, it is possible to state the followings:

**Hypothesis 1:** “The Internet is likely to push a re-intermediation process in the art management field, creating the context for the birth of new sustainable/profitable managerial solutions dedicated to the artists”;

**Hypothesis 2:** “The Internet is likely to make the hiring system less embedded in artists’ personal networks and more transparent, facilitating the access for emerging artists”;

**Hypothesis 3:** “The Internet is likely to have a disintermediating effect in the art labour market, affecting the proximity with crucial market makers and challenging the issue of location in the art market”;

The case study methodology allowed to test these hypotheses and to extrapolate some general consideration upon the effect of the World Wide Web upon the artists’ careers and to finally answer to the research question.

After the presentation of Wooloo.org case study, the hypotheses are fully elaborated and explained.
6. CASE STUDY: WOOLOO.ORG

In this section the case study Wooloo.org is presented, in order to test the findings extracted from the theoretical analysis. The detailed description of Wooloo.org allows the reader to have a proper understanding of the issue proposed, thereby being able to compare the instances of Wooloo with those that he/she has seen emerge in other situations and generalize the results in a consistent way in order to get a wider perspective on the subject (Shenton, 2004).

Starting with a brief overview of the company’s history and structure, the chapter explains the challenges that Wooloo is facing. The in-depth investigation of Wooloo.org allowed the author to test the above-presented hypotheses, thanks also to an exhaustive analysis of Wooloo users’ interviews.

In order to facilitate the reading of the chapter, it is to be clear that the name “Wooloo Productions” refers to the founder artistic group, the name “Wooloo.org” refers to the website and the name “Wooloo.inc” refers to the economical entity that owns Wooloo.org. Since the activities and responsibilities of the three entities are often overlapping, due to the small size of Wooloo.org, the simple expression Wooloo will be mainly used, and explicit distinctions will be made when needed.

6.1. HISTORY

Wooloo.org was born as an art experiment in online social networking. The platform was first launched in 2002 by the artistic group Wooloo Productions, with the purpose to connect artists from all over the world. The group is composed by the Danish artists Martin Rosengaard and Sixten Kai Nielsen. The third co-founder is the programmer Russell Ratshin, in charge of the technical aspects. Mr Nielsen lives in Copenhagen and he graduated at University of Copenhagen, Denmark. Mr Rosengaard has an Honours degree from University of London, UK, and is currently living between Copenhagen and New York. Together they have been participating in highly regarded artistic events around the world, such as Manifesta 8, and their work has been featured in Art in America, BBC, ArtForum, New York Times and Time Out NY and TIP Berlin. They are frequent giving lectures at universities such as New School New York, NYU and Copenhagen University. Mr Ratshin received a BA from UCLA in Political Science in 1997 and a MA from Columbia University in Political Science in 1998, he has worked for numerous Silicon Valley companies in various roles ranging from
Technical Support Representative to Software Architect. He currently lives in LA.

Wooloo’s founders’ profile strongly reconnects with the work of Charles Leadbetter and Kate Oakley (1999) on what they term “the Independents” or “New Cultural Entrepreneurs” - young people working in micro businesses in the cultural industries. The founders belong to the first generation that grew up with computers, being able to fully exploit the possibilities given by new technologies, and they have been 'pushed' towards self-employment because they entered the workforce in a moment of economic recession (Leadbeter & Oakley, 1999 p. 15, cited in Gill, 2002 p.9).

The name “Wooloo” derives from the Indigenous Australian word for water meeting, crowd moving, to indicate the leading principles of connectivity and information transmit behind the organization. Back at the time, Wooloo has been an innovation breakthrough: the initial version of the website was launched as a simple profile website for artists to showcase their work, before social networks became mainstream. As the years went by, the project became less focus on the social network aspects and more on the possibilities to connect artists with opportunities, through the so-called “Open Calls” system: exhibitions, travel and job opportunities open for applicants (e.g. A gallery aiming to produce a photographic exhibition looks for photographers: artists working with this medium can submit their work for consideration for the exhibition). The founders wanted to turn Wooloo.org into a destination art professionals would need to find or post the newest professional opportunities. This strategy was implemented step by step during 2009 and 2010 and since then the memberships number has rapidly increased from about 5,000 unique members in 2008 to the current 20,000 and more artists in more than 150 countries of today. For the sake of this research, Wooloo’s artistic population has been considered representative of the contemporary visual art market and its description, resulting from the data collection among the Wooloo’s artists, is exposed in Chapter 4.3.

In spring 2010, Wooloo Inc., the US entity that owns and runs Wooloo.org, was founded, with the purpose of completing the shift from Wooloo as artistic project to Wooloo as business project.

6.2. COMPANY and ORGANIZATIONAL IDENTITY DESCRIPTION

At the moment the company, based in Copenhagen, is run by the founders Mr Nielsen and Mr Rosengaard, while Mr Ratshin is helping with the programming and technical part. Moreover, they receive support by different interns, students from all over the world working temporarily in the Copenhagen office.
The mission, stated on Wooloo’s own website\textsuperscript{47}, is “to facilitate relationships between members of artistic communities around the world”. Wooloo aspires to position as intermediary between artists and exhibitors/gallerists/event organizers/grant releasers/foundations\textsuperscript{48} and to create a valuable online tool for the global, professional art world. Through the highly scalable web-platform www.wooloo.org, the organization wants to become the main facilitator of promotion, collaboration and other services between the players the contemporary art world.

Accessing the website, users (both artists and organizers) can, as first step, create a profile. The access is open and free of charge. The users pay only when/if they require a more specialized service, e.g. additional promotion.

After the subscription, Wooloo offers different services:

- Organizers can publish for a fee their own offers for jobs, and they can advertise the openings of their own exhibitions, creating the so-called “Open Calls”; 
- Artists can post their own works and create online exhibitions displaying their most recent or significant pieces; they are periodically alerted when there are Open Calls that could match their professional focus\textsuperscript{49} and they can subsequently apply for them through Wooloo.

Wooloo supports furthermore the organization of residency programs, considering “Hospitality” a fundamental concept for the founders’ both artistic and entrepreneurial work.

Wooloo currently operates on a non-profit base: all the revenues coming from the services offered are used to cover costs (e.g. rent of the office, web-services), to ensure the independent development of further opportunities for artists, the execution of projects and the establishment of new features on the Wooloo.org website.

At the moment, Wooloo is facing a transition phase from the organizational identity point of view: since Spring 2010, Wooloo is struggling to switch to a profit model.

As a matter of facts, the project started as an art experiment, characterized by a purely normative identity\textsuperscript{50}. As soon as the network members increased, the utilitarian dimension

\textsuperscript{47} http://www.wooloo.org/about/people-behind

\textsuperscript{48} From now own the whole category will be indicated with the term “organizers”.

\textsuperscript{49} When an artist creates a profile is required to communicate his fields of interest, so that Wooloo’s staff can match artists and open calls in the best way.

\textsuperscript{50} Wooloo founders started the Wooloo art project without any interest for monetary remuneration. The case conforms to the main definition, given by Parson (1960, cited in Albert and Whetten, 2004, p. 106) of a normative identity organization with educational, expressive and cultural purposes.
gained importance: Wooloo begun the transition from a single normative identity to a hybrid one\textsuperscript{51}. Moreover, the participation aspect, central at the beginning of Wooloo’s experience, seems to become just a peripheral one: the majority of the artists check other artists profile once a month (22.1%) or once every 3 months (16.9%).

On the one hand, Wooloo is evidently an artistic project: its founders take care of it with a level of commitment that is not balanced by money remuneration. The aspect of artistic commitment is getting explicitly emphasized on their website\textsuperscript{52} and the office policy includes the use of un-paid interns, ready to collaborate and motivated thanks to the excellent reputation of the founders. Communication with users is always carried out with a personal tone, and sustained by a dedicated customer service.

On the other hand, Wooloo.org is a business organization oriented towards economic production. Even if this utilitarian dimension of the Wooloo identity is recent and less developed than the normative one, nonetheless:

- Wooloo is keeping track of the economic situation through a budget plan, a tool that aims to plan for scarcity and minimization of costs.
- Wooloo is measuring the performances on a monthly base to spot the fallacies.
- Wooloo hired a professional business consultant in order to maximize profits.

These are evidences that Wooloo identity is in fact double at the present moment\textsuperscript{53}.

The leading factors of this change are two. Firstly, the network grew in dimension. Figure 10 shows how users, exhibitions created, open calls and applications to them all enormously grew from October 2010 till March 2011, e.g. the users’ growth rate from October 2010 to March 2011 has been around 76%, forcing Wooloo to assume a more organized perspective in order to be able to manage it. It is the art world environmental complexity that pushed the growth of a utilitarian dimension in Wooloo.

\textsuperscript{51} A hybrid organization is defined by Albert and Whetten as “an organization whose identity is composed by two or more types that would not normally be expected to go together” (Albert and Whetten, 2004, p. 95)

\textsuperscript{52} For example: “made for artists by artists” (http://www.wooloo.org/about/people-behind)

\textsuperscript{53} This theoretical assessment is called Extended Metaphor Analysis and implies the assessment of the possibility to describe Wooloo’s identity with both the church-normative and the business-utilitarian metaphors, in order to understand the state of organizational identity (Albert and Whetten, 2004, p. 105).
In a second place, Wooloo needs to find the balance between the following polarities, typical of companies working in the creative field:

- **Artistic Value versus Mass Entertainment**: Wooloo needs to keep high the quality of the art proposed on the website, but at the same time allowing the maximum number of people to subscribe;
- **Product Differentiation versus Market Innovation**: Wooloo has to keep the website technology user-friendly and accessible, but at the same time guarantee the novelties in the field;
- **Vertical Integration versus Flexible Specialization**: Wooloo needs to maintain a personal approach with all the users offering at the same time a quick and efficient response to customers’ needs.

This quest for balance requires a managerial effort towards utilitarian organization.

Network’s growth and need of balance drove the organizational change of Wooloo.

As stated in the literature, the construction of an organizational identity is a polyphony: The founders and people working behind the network are certainly involved in the creation of the organizational identity, but the high involvement of the community allows also the users themselves to strongly participate in this creational work. Nevertheless, Wooloo’s team

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54 Lampel et Al. (2002) described five polarities. These three are the ones that are the most affecting Wooloo.

cannot ignore the emergence of the utilitarian dimension in its identity due to environmental factors, but has to actively deal with it. Especially in the art sector, the drift towards a more commercial characterization can be a disturbance for the art community. The aim of Wooloo management team should be to drive this change in the smoothest way possible, taking in consideration users’ needs and opinions.

Wooloo intends to manage the identity drift through the development of a new business model – described in the next paragraph - in order to switch from a non-profit to a for profit entity.

6.3. H1 ➔ SUSTAINABILITY and WOOLOO’s NEW BUSINESS MODEL

After the company description, the reader has now the elements to understand why Wooloo’s functioning can be helpful in order to test the hypothesis about Web and artistic careers: it is a unique on-going example of online re-intermediation in the art world. To test the hypotheses, eight online semi-structured interviews were administered to Wooloo’s users, and analysed, together with the findings from the questionnaire.

- H1 “The Internet is likely to push a re-intermediation process in the art management field, creating the context for the birth of new sustainable/profitable managerial solutions dedicated to the artists”

Analysing the interviews, seven out of eight interviewees confirmed that they noticed significant change in the artistic careers management since the Internet started diffusing (Q12), and, in general, interviewees pointed out that online communication is easier, it is easier to get in touch with gallerists and to send material, and that “Artists do not rely on being represented by galleries anymore and do more often promote themselves and build up their own network of collectors” (S.J.).

Online re-intermediation is therefore happening, but are the new business models sustainable? In order to test H1, the author considered Wooloo’s new business model feasibility as a paradigmatic case.

A first step towards the development of the new business model has been the customer satisfaction questionnaire, in order to study users’ need, level of acceptance of the new model and willingness to pay.

In general, artists’ opinion is pretty unilateral, and they seem to be very exigent:

- To create an online portfolio is considered important/very important by 66.2% of the respondents;
To be able to promote personal works on Wooloo homepage or in the newsletter is considered important/very important by 66% of the respondents;

- To search and apply for art residencies is considered important/very important by 51.1% of the respondents;
- To get free accommodation in capitals around the world is considered important/very important by 53.9% of the respondents.

- To get free accommodation in capitals around the world is considered important/very important by 53.9% of the respondents.

Among the various data, the result about the importance of applying for exhibitions opportunities stands out: 108 respondents over 195 (55.4%) declared having this opportunity is very important (while another 29.7% declared that it is important, for a total of 85.1%).

Also finding opportunities especially matching the profile and search and apply for international grants seem to be crucial issue: respectively, the 86.8% and the 73.9% declared them to be important/very important.

Only the possibilities to search and apply for jobs and find assistant jobs for established artists are considered important/very important by less then the 50% of the users (but the percentage - 48.9% of users consider it important - is still relevant).

From this data it has been possible to draw a model of the main needs of Wooloo’s users, and related solutions proposed by Wooloo to satisfy them:

- The high value artists give to the possibilities of online self-promotion indicates their need to be helped to emerge and get in touch with important actors in the field → Wooloo is trying to answer improving the Open Calls system;
- The high value artists give to the possibility of finding residencies and free accommodation witnesses how the art market is still centred on agglomerates and cultural clusters → Wooloo is offering a service of Residency Programs browsing;
- The high value artists give to the possibility of finding free accommodation and of getting international grants is an evidence of the need of financial support for artists → Wooloo is working on free accommodation service and a grants browsing service.

Also the British Culture, Media and Sport Committee stated, after a long and exhaustive study about British art market (2004-05), that “the information and guidance could be disseminated in a more accessible and convenient way” and they “recommend the further development of an online portal offering business advice to artists, supporting networking opportunities, and providing access to the arts more generally”, witnessing the general need of changes in the
Basing on the responses, the new business model has been drafted: the members are divided into Artists, AIR (Residencies organizers) and Art Institutions (including galleries, festivals organizers, exhibition organizers…). Separating the profile typologies would allow Wooloo to respond better to each category’s needs. The content is divided in different “Toolboxes”, pages through which the users can access all the information and the opportunities regarding a specific category (Exhibitions, Funding and Grants, Jobs, People and Shop). Regarding artists, the new membership model foresees upgraded profiles, offered under payment. Artists can create a free “BASIC” profile that guarantees all the services already available now on Wooloo: uploading basic info, portfolio and CV on the profile and access to the network and allows artists to promote their profile, to buy additional promotion, to view all the other complete profiles and an overview of the offers in the Jobs, Funding and People Toolboxes. Additionally, users can upgrade their “BASIC” profiles creating “PRO” Profiles, available for $20 per year. A “PRO” Profile includes all the “BASIC” features, but in addition it allows artists to buy promotion for a cheaper price compared to the price offered to “BASIC” profiles owners and to have complete access to the other features.

The timing of this change is still unsecure, but in this way Wooloo hopes to manage the identity drift and switch to a for profit model, beneficial for the company itself, maintaining also a strong artistic focus.

This draft of the new model was exposed in the questionnaire and respondents were asked about their appreciation and willingness to pay for that. Willingness to pay is an important feature to considerate before implementing the model considering that, as shown in Paragraph 4.3., artists are an occupational category that suffers from significant income penalties (Wassall & Alper, 1992; Throsby, 1994; Abbing, 2002). Researches about willingness to pay show how the artists’ category is not willing to make huge investments and 62% of participants declare that they would not appreciate the implementation of the new model. Nevertheless, 38% of the respondents declared an average willingness to pay around $2,4 a month for the upgraded model: considering 7,600 artists paying, (38% of actual 20,000 users), the monthly income would be around $18,000. From Wooloo’s budget, the monthly average expense in 2009 has been around $5,000, so, even considering that the estimate might be optimistic, from this simplistic analysis Wooloo has the potential to be a sustainable and profitable reality.
H1 is to be accepted, and Wooloo itself is a sustainable example of the re-intermediation processes.

6.4. H2 and H3 ➔ ARE EMBEDDEDNESS and LOCATION STILL CRUCIAL?

- H2 “The Internet is likely to make the hiring system less embedded in artists’ personal networks and more transparent, facilitating the access for emerging artists”

In order to test H2, analysing the effects of the Internet on the embeddedness of career development in social relationship, interviewees were asked which job search method they are using (Q1), how they formed their professional network (Q2), whether Wooloo enlarged their professional network (Q6) and how important is to have valuable personal relationship for the development of an artistic career (Q8).

Opinions appear controversial. There are cases of complete refusal of the Internet as helpful tool, e.g. in the case of the interviewee J.O (“I’ve been trying very hard for a few years now to make a career for myself […] promoting myself and my website and it’s got me nowhere”) but in general, the interviewees pointed out how Internet is helping inequalities reduction if the art field, giving the possibility of a free flow of information:

“All exhibitions, grants and residencies programs are mostly uploaded and available in Internet” (K.A.), fact that makes the Internet a tool that cannot be renounced.

Moreover, to the question “Do you think the Internet, and initiatives like Wooloo, make it easier to “get discover” and to start a career in the art world?” (Q10), six out of eight
interviewees replied positively. M.G. explains that “Wooloo helps artists to see the art world internationally”, which could mean “a bigger potential audience” (“You never now what people have been looking at on the Internet”, H.H).

However, the Internet appears to be a necessary but not sufficient tool. Most of the interviewees underlined how the process is still not transparent at all: the Internet is not as strong as “to be at the right place knowing the right people” (C.F.):

“From my experience the “knowing someone” in person is crucial for success. I have made a few contacts via the Internet resulting in shows during my time as an artist though. I also do have colleagues who use the Internet more strategic for making art contacts and thus have gained a lot from that.” (R.J.).

“In the art field to know someone is more important than having talent or a good work.” (C.F.)

“To get discovered has nothing to do with Internet, it depends on the team and helpers, contacts, professional background, school who helps artists to organize shows or be at art fairs or in galleries” (K.A.)

Another downside of the diffusion of the Internet is that it is making everyone an artist (“Quantity makes it confusing for collectors to spot “the” artist” S.J.), which makes it difficult for the more gifted ones to stand out in the crowd. Both the interviewees S.J. and K.A. complained about that.

Being that so, the Internet appears to enhance transparency and to be useful tool for emergent artists, but the effect on the embeddedness of the hiring system in artists’ personal network, though existing, seems weak:

“I think on an individual level being part of such network can increase opportunities. But generally I do believe personal networking an introduction is worth much more than Internet presence can offer.” (S.J.)

“To know someone is the most important in art field and in the whole world. It may happen that an art-portal increase opportunities to find many many artist profiles, or become friends […] but serious galleries, dealers are working with artists they know personally or invest in well-known names” (K.A.)
“The face to face contact is still very important, crucial in fact. Where the Internet can facilitate a meeting in person, then it is working very well. The Internet should not be a substitute for real contact” (M.C.), but it makes “Communication much much easier. Not as time consuming and cheaper too.” (H.H.).

In conclusion, despite the downsides, H2 is to be accepted, because the interviews witnessed how the Internet is for real enhancing transparency in the field and making communication much easier.

- **H3** “The Internet is likely to have a disintermediating effect in the art labour market affecting the proximity with crucial market makers and challenging the issue of location in the art market”

In order to test H3, analysing the issue of spatial concentration, the interviewees were interrogated about how important it is to live in a cultural centre (Q9).

The interviewee C.F. explains:

“I am from Sao Paulo, the most important cultural center of the Latin America.... It was extremely important till 5 years ago... every year it is losing importance and soon it is going to be useless to live in overpriced Centers as NY, London or even Berlin […]. Authentic artists can be everywhere even more now with Internet. As a matter it is very good to do not be in a cultural center, it is cheaper to live and gives you more freedom to focus on your work not receiving influences or concerned with what is happening out of your studio. Maybe Internet is going to help to make artist develop more authentic work and less related with the last trends of the art market”.

On the other side, K.A. underlines how “it is good to live in a cultural city, you have more opportunity to visit galleries and exhibitions, meet artists” and that “Internet is very useful tool, but a paintings shall be watched in the reality, too, so artists are not independent from dealers and gallerists and personal contacts, costumers especially if having a contract or they sell art.”

M.G also affirms his need “to be in a city like London […] also as part of my on-going development as an artist”.

To get free accommodation in capitals around the world is considered important/very important by 53.9% of the respondents to the questionnaire.
Moreover, six out of eight interviewees confirmed that the Internet and Wooloo make it easier to manage their own career in a more flexible and independent way, helping with international contacts and as opportunities portal.

Thanks to the Internet, “Artists are operating like micro businesses completely managing and marketing themselves […] Artists do not rely on being represented by galleries anymore and do more often promote themselves and build up their own network of collectors” (S.J.). According to K.A., “An open and easily handled website or blog is rather important and more interesting than a closed group’s profile for instance for a gallery director or an art dealer” and the Internet makes easier “to send portfolios …by mail”. M.G. affirms to “use the Internet to contact galleries which before the Internet would have been very time consuming”, for example there is now the possibility to “check out a gallery in another country on the internet without having to initially travel to that country”. S.J. confirms that the Internet “definitely makes it easier to obtain information through art networking sites but to make collectors interested in your work it needs a personal recommendation through a friend, gallerist or else”.

From the interviews it is possible to conclude that, even though the distance from strategic agglomeration is still a crucial variable in the art world, the Internet is lowering the intensity of the phenomena: “while agglomeration economies remain important, these agglomerations are increasingly linked to global production and consumption network” (Andersson and Andersson, 2006, p.15). Wooloo – and consequently the Internet - appears to be a tool to expand the personal network of the artists both in geographical terms and in the sense that it allows them to get more easily in touch with market makers.

In conclusion, artists can connect easily and look for opportunities, but in order to fully exploit these opportunities they should be prepared to move closer to creative centres (See Creative milieu, Robert Florida, While, 2003). As the interviewee M.G. clearly explains: “Wooloo helps artists to see the art world internationally. And perhaps this means there is a bigger potential audience for a particular art practice”.

Therefore, H3 is also to be accepted because, despite the importance of geographical location is still very important, the Internet is bringing artists closer to crucial market makers, and the trend is towards disintermediation.

56 Perk (1996) showed how globalization in the art world is still an important parameter of local mediation towards the global market.
There are among the interviewees both cases of successful and unsuccessful usage of online tools in order to start/develop an artistic career. Except for the interviewee J.O., completely disillusioned about his own artistic career after several trials, all the other interviews described the Internet as a really helpful tool, even though they re-dimensioned the importance that the theory gives to the Internet.

The main benefits of the Web seem to be:

- The opportunity of searching freely for information;
- The opportunity of showing around examples of work at zero cost;
- The opportunity to reach a wider audience\(^{57}\).

In same cases though, as in the case of the interviewee R.J., Wooloo really helped coming across quite a few of the opportunities that had led to exhibitions offline. It can be interpreted as a signal of the big potential the Internet has, that could be manifesting in the long term.

In general terms, hypotheses 1 and 2 are to be accepted because the Internet, as stated in the theory, is for real working towards the enhancement of the transparency in artistic careers and the disintermediation on the job searching processes. The Internet has made the system more transparent, making the access to information more easy, quick and transparent, but the importance of “knowing the right people” and “being in the right place” cannot be denied. At the moment though, the Internet seems to be a necessary but not sufficient tool. It can be said that the Net, being available to everybody, is facilitating transparency and access to information, but, for the fact of being so diffused, it does not “make the difference”. Access to the Web became a commodity, so it is no more a source of competitive advantage (Carr, 2003) (“Not finding someone’s work on the internet seems a little bit odd nowadays…” R.J.). It is to be considered an evolving tool serving the contemporary visual art market - “a step in the right direction”, as stated by the interviewee V.A. – but it seems as it has not fully developed its potential yet: embeddedness and spatial concentration are losing importance but they are still very strong variable in artistic careers development.

\(^{57}\) “The internet has increase opportunities for sourcing galleries, and information generally. Also showing example of work in the past would have been with large transparencies, which are expensive to produce. [...] It is easier to publicise a show via email. Having your own website can help in reaching an audience” M.C.
7. GENERAL IMPLICATIONS

Wooloo.org is an example within a broader category including other art job search online platforms (E.g. Artreview.com, DeviantArt.com, Myartspace.com, Re-Title.com, Saatchi-Gallery.co.uk), which are trying to bring transparency in a field that is still perceived as oligarchic. Thanks to the in-depth analysis of Wooloo.org, an emblematic example of growing organization working offering online services to contemporary visual artists, it is possible to deduce some conclusions about the whole field of online contemporary visual art management and careers.

Therefore, it is possible to make some considerations regarding the impacts of the Internet on artists’ career possibilities and answer to the research question:

*How is the Internet impacting the Art Labour Market Inequalities regarding the development of artists’ careers?*

The prospect of transferability should be accepted considering the fact that the author provided sufficient contextual information about the fieldwork sites to enable the reader to compare the instances of Wooloo with those that he/she has seen emerge in other situations and generalize the results (Shenton, 2004).

According to empirical data, contemporary visual artists seem to perceive the Internet in a general positive way from: only 4% of all online artists (8% of paid online artists) state that the Internet has made it much harder for their work to get noticed and only 3% of all online artists (6% of paid online artists) state that the Internet had a major deleterious effect on their ability to protect their creative works (Madden, 2004).

In particular:

- The Internet is now potentially connecting almost 2.000.000.000 of people and increasing the dimension of individuals’ network. Networking involves expanding the artists’ circle of trust (Dubini and Aldrich, 1991). The Internet allows artists to create more weak ties but then it is up to each artist to transform them in strong ties, characterized from trust, predictability and use of voice (Dubini and Aldrich, 1991).

- The Internet technology is helping in the development of inter-organizational value chains linkages to the benefit of the organization (in this case, the artist) and helps
achieve sustainable competitive advantage (Barlow and Li, 2005), improving, beyond the dimension of the network, also its quality. The Internet allows users to integrate information (Barlow and Li, 2005), to search for job opportunities, share information about them and confront different opinions, enhancing the transparency, and consequently the quality, of the labour supply, and increasing the number of employment possibilities for each artist. The Internet, **improving networking abilities**, avoids dependence on a single organization for the development of an idiosyncratic career pattern (boundaryless career, as defined by Arthur, 1994). ‘Cultivating networks’ (Hirsch, 1987) is fundamental to careers development, providing access to other people’s knowledge and resources. The work of artists can be labelled as self-programmable labour: it means, “it is equipped with the ability to retrain itself and adapt to new tasks, new processes and new source of information” (Castells, 2000, p. 12).

- On the Net, **everyone is becoming an artist**. On the World Wide Web, millions of people are constructing multimedia self-portraits on their home pages (Bruckman, 1995).

- The missing ingredient that the Net contributes is **audience**: the World Wide Web is guaranteeing a new visibility and new forms of consumption of cultural products (LeG Report, Istat), and, as Thompson argues, it allows a publicness of openness and visibility (1995).

- One of the most important transformations brought by the Internet concerns the development of flexible work (Castells, 2000) and the **individualization of labour**, opposed to the processes of socialization of work typical of the industrial era. Artists own now their own career and they have embraced the Internet as a tool to create, promote, and sell their own work. They can be now seen as self-organizing units, comparable to firms/businesses. Careers are now conceived as accumulative processes and threads weaving themselves into the texture of other careers (Skov, forthcoming).

- The Internet is opening up the system to **internationalization**. In general, the impact of globalization on the art market is very debated: it may change the sources of competitive advantage in different directions – for example, it may
increase the advantage of holding resources or holding access to resources; it may lead to homogeneous cultural products or produce greater innovation thanks to the mingling of different culture (Lampel et al., 2006). From the geographical point of view, the market recently transform from being divided in national markets relatively communicating among each others, to single markets heavily connected to form a world wide system, due to the fact that the Internet is at the same time cause of the globalization process and result of it, as an instrument for the global exchange of information (Codignola, 2010). The global communication network can be modelled using the random network formation model, proposed, in a different context, by the mathematical biologist Stuart Kauffman58. The initial point of analysis is a finite regular grid with unconnected nodes at every intersection. With the progress of communication technologies, one randomly selected node decides to connect to a neighbouring one. This non-linear generation of links proceeds in the same way period after period, reaching a level where the system seems to be an all-encompassing network of virtually all the individuals. This is exactly what happened to the art network: nowadays, even though agglomeration economies still weight on the balances of galleries and organizations, the connectivity is virtually worldwide.

As illustrated by Andersson and Andersson (2006, p. 216), there are economies of scale in interaction at long distance: the more globalized is a network, the larger is the interaction pattern in terms of size and special scope. In term of time and space the Internet makes physical location largely irrelevant (“spaceless proximity”) (Baym, 2002; See also Baron, 1998; Lea and Spears, 1995; McKenna and Bargh, 2000; Sproull and Faraj, 1997). It also dramatically reduces the costs of communication at distance (Baron, 1998; Carnevale and Probst, 1997; Mckenna and Bargh, 2000). This system also increases learning possibilities for artists, bringing positive externalities for all the organizations that interact with the individual (Powell and Brantley, 1992). In facts, the model for a boundaryless career proposed by Arthur (See also Rousseau 1996; Sullivan and Arthur, 2006) is a mixture of physical and psychological mobility: the Internet, beyond enlarging artists’ networking possibilities, is allowing them to physically find different jobs in different parts of the world.

Since “the benefits of networking increase more then proportionally with increases in the number of subscribers to the network services” (Andersson and Andersson, 2006, 58 Cited in Andersson and Andersson, 2006.
p. 210) it is evident how fast the network grew and it is still growing. This issue also raises the question of the trans-nationalization of culture and communication, which will not necessarily come about through global sharing of identical products, but through the re-composition of global–local relations in the new networks (Bustamante, 2004).

- The Internet supports clearer visibility of what it is happening across the value network, allowing a more equal competition.

- The Web allows the birth of artists’ personal spaces to display their works, e.g. personal websites, increasing the artists’ possibilities for self-marketing\textsuperscript{59}, giving artists the possibility to “take care of the business” without taking too much time from creation. Artists can display their work creating a personal blog even without any programming notion, but just subscribing to blog providers such as Tumblr\textsuperscript{60} or Blogspot\textsuperscript{61}, or creating a profile on online artists’ communities, such as Wooloo itself, or simply sending an email.

- With the same tools, artists can get in touch with crucial market makers, without relying on traditional offline intermediaries (disintermediation), and avoiding the “discriminations” embedded in the traditional system based on personal networking. “Internet search rates exceeded those of such traditional methods as the services of private employment agencies, contacting friends or relatives, and using the registers of unions or professional organizations” (Kuhn and Skuterud, 2000). The Internet, threatening the galleries power, can help artists emancipating, straightening their position (Rebecca Salter’s memorandum – House of Commons, Culture, Media and Sport Committee, 2005). In short, the Internet facilitate both established institutions and relatively unknown artists, that now can have they own online exhibition space.

\textsuperscript{59} See also Qualman, 2009: “Word of Mouth goes World of Mouth”

\textsuperscript{60} www.tumblr.com

\textsuperscript{61} www.blogspot.com
Disintermediation has been followed by a process of **re-intermediation**: On the one hand, new players, e.g. Wooloo, are providing easy-buildable online exhibition spaces for free, providing artists with possibilities for self-expression and self-promotion (McLaughlin, 1996, Vickers, 2005), disintermediation in respect to the figure of the artist manager. As Mclaughlin states, these opportunities are very few in the physical exhibition world. On the other hand, traditional players try to go “back in business”: in the art panorama, online galleries\(^{62}\) and virtual museums\(^{63}\), existing exclusively online, joined real galleries and museum. Also the art management is exploring new forms of marketing and new strategies: a clear example is the Google Art Project\(^{64}\), a totally new form of museum marketing.

The Internet, with its search capabilities and low-cost communications, has the potential to dramatically change **job-search techniques**. Some traditional methods, such as contacting friends and relatives, could be conceivably partly displaced by the Internet. Other traditional methods, such as sending résumés, could be complementary with the Internet, and could increase in use as the Internet expands. 23% of all online artists and 41% of paid online artists say the Internet has helped them in their creative pursuits and careers. Moreover, artists seem to be more and more keen on using the Net: 23% of all online artists (45% of paid online artists) report using the Internet or email to promote or display their art; 23% of all online artists (41% of paid online artists) say they personally use the Internet or email to keep in touch with fans of their art; 21% of all online artists (44% of paid online artists) use the Internet to schedule performances and other promotional events; 20% of all online artists (38% of paid online artists) say they have used the Internet or email to provide free samples or previews of their art to the public (Madden, 2004).

Due to all the above-mentioned characteristics, a branch of the art world is exploiting the Net potential in order to fight the archaic and elitist aspects of the art world.

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\(^{62}\) E.g. Saatchi online, www.saatchionline.com

\(^{63}\) E.g. The Virtual Museum of Canada (http://www.museevirtuel-virtualmuseum.ca/index-eng.jsp) or the International Museum of Women (http://www.imow.org/home/index).

\(^{64}\) See Chapter 5.2.
Wooloo finds a position in this stream, facilitating the relationship between emerging artists and institutions.

However, as concluded from hypotheses testing, the potential of the Internet is not fully developed yet. How will it develop?

Leadbeater (2008) describes five possible “futures” for the Internet, summarizing the opinions of different scholars:

- Some scholars, e.g. Webster, think that the Net is overblown: people just do quickly and with a broader interaction what they have always done, meaning that the Internet in itself does not bring any valuable contribution to the society;
- Some others argue that the Net might have a big impact on society but it will take a lot longer to work through than the web-optimists argue;
- Others, e.g. Keen, think that the Web will be big, it will have a rapid impact and it will be mainly bad, eroding ability of independent thinking and sense of privacy and identity;
- Some, Leadbeater included, think that the Net is already big, and will get bigger fast, an it will be mainly good, creating diversity, choice and a fast, frictionless market: the real measure of the Internet is whether it gives us as a society radically different options for how we might organize ourselves;
- There is a small group, who say the Net is big and it has largely been good, so far, but it could easily become bad in future.

Depending on which one of these projections is going to be realized, the Internet will or not strength its position in refers to the art labour market and it will affect more powerfully artistic careers.
8. LIMITATIONS and FURTHER DISCUSSION

8.1. METHODOLOGICAL LIMITATIONS

From the methodology point of view, primary data collection suffered few limitations:

- The questionnaire was meant to analyse the future possibilities for the website, in order to develop a consistent business plan. Considered the impossibility to “spam” Wooloo users with multiple questionnaires, the information collected have been used for this research as well, even if not collected ad hoc.

- The interviews were performed online, because, as already pointed out in Chapter 2., this method is consistent with the meaning and the purposes of this research. However, the online data collection has some limitations, among which low response rate, lost of personal “touch” and connection with the interviewees, loss of spontaneity and low control possibility for the interviewer over the interview (Bryman and Bell, 2003).

- Some limitations concern also the definition of the reference population and the difficulty to obtain precise data. The market in question is dominated by self-employment ad the presence of multiple jobs and the high frequency of job search and changing do not make the data collection easier. The Artists’ Labour Market, as stated by Towse (2001, p.47), is an area of investigation “fraught with problems of definition”. E.g., there are no clear criteria to define specifically what an artist is.

Same limitations affected also the researches secondary data has been extracted from. Therefore, the author decided to work on data and literature consistent with the definition of artist given by Wooloo. Narrowing down the field of work, it has been possible to draw consistent conclusions without being stuck in definition problems. However, the re-defined field used for this research is not completely free from definition problems: for example, many artists do not work full-time on their artistic occupation, or it is one of their main sources of revenue. In case of some artists on Wooloo, the artistic occupation is just a mere hobby and not a real profession. The analysis of Art Labour market requires certainly deeper empirical researches – as suggested by Benhamou (2003). Anyway, taken in consideration the difficulties to do empirical researches on a worldwide scale and with such volatile data, the

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66 See also Codignola, 2010; Leg Report, Istat
author attempted to provide a valid general framework, usable as starting base for further researches.

8.2. THEORETICAL LIMITATIONS

The research touches some issues that would deserve a deeper analysis, impossible to be done in this context due to space and subject constraints. An example is the issue of the democratizing power of the Internet, but generally the whole the literature upon Internet and society presented in the paper has to be considered a short overview.

Important scholars, who gave an immense, but less recent and less specific, contribution to the discussion, have not been mentioned in the research. In particular, Arjun Appadurai, theorizer of the deterritorialization, and Walter Benjamin, whose work was inspiratory for the majority of the bibliography used for this thesis, and for the thesis itself.

Moreover, the author did not mention the literature about cultural globalization, which has been enormously influential in the studies about mass communication. Since from the early 90s Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, member of the so-called Frankfurt School, critically discussed the role of mass communication in modern societies. Their conception of mass communication and globalization was pretty negative: in their view, mass culture, produced by the increasing globalization, was manipulating popular cultures, impeding the evolution of conscious individuals. Several scholars expressed critiques to mass globalization, including Herbert Schiller, theorizer of cultural imperialism, Zygmunt Bauman and Manuel Castells, who has been quickly mentioned but in a surely insufficient way. These scholars mainly criticized the unilateral traditional mass communication techniques, such as television and radio. These studies about former mass communication tools have been enormously influential in the contemporary understanding of the Internet, but the World Wide Web compared to radio and television, allows a two-way communication flow, being potentially able to over ride the problems and the risks created by the old media (Slevin, 2000).

Also the labour market analysis is not complete because from all the central features the author decided to focus only on workers, hiring transaction and networks functioning, leaving for further analysis the description of employers, work division and contractual agreements (Tilly and Tilly, 2006).

In addition, it has to be pointed out that, even though the potentially global reach of the Internet and Wooloo imposes the author to make an all-comprehensive and generalized discourse about a world wide contemporary visual artists’ labour market, this labour market
actually does not exist in itself, but it is fragmented in several sub-markets, according to the countries and even to the cities, each of them characterized by different mechanisms. This is a witness of the spreading counter posed phenomena of “glocalization”. Nevertheless, this research aims to give a general picture that will be hopefully useful for a deeper understanding of the contemporary trends. 23% of all online artists and 36% of paid online artists report the Internet has had a big effect on their connection to the local arts community (Madden, 2004).

8.3. FURTHER DISCUSSION

The majority of sociologists who studied the Internet have focused on virtual communities or politics issues (DiMaggio et al., 2001), not providing real hints for the application of the theories to the art field. Therefore, the theoretical findings provided by the author, and supported by Wooloo case study, need to be analysed deeper and sustained through further empirical studies.

Some of Wooloo’s competitors could be a good starting point in order to get some comparable evidences. The strongest player in the field is certainly Saatchi and Saatchi online, but also E-Flux, Artreview.com and DeviantArt.com cases could be interesting. Another possible field of research is institutionalization (exit from non-reproductive behavioural patterns) in the field: the field is moving so fast that it is possible to observe some social orders or patterns have attained a certain state among Wooloo.org and its competitors (e.g. all the art online communities offer a newsletter). From being a complete new form of organizations, these services are already becoming more and more similar among each other, forming a so-called “iron cage”67. The level of institutionalization in the field and the entity and value of competitive advantage could be an interesting proposal for further discussions.

Further more, an issue influencing the artists’ behaviour offline and, in particular, online is the copyright issue, the risks in publicly opening up their work and display it through on potentially worldwide platform68. This issue has not being touched in the research but could be an inspiring point of view for further studies.

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68 To know more about the subject see the work of Legros P. (2006) Copyright, Art and Internet in Ginsburg V.A. & Throsby D. (Eds.) Handbook of the Economics of Art and Culture – Vol. 1. North-Holland and of
Moreover, the previous relation between the author, Wooloo.org and the interviewees allowed the author not to consider some fundamental problems regarding every kind of online relation: the risks of low commitment, poor morale, role ambiguity, social loafing (Barlow and Li, 2005) and online trust. In the online environment social cues are reduced, and so it is the ability for the parties to develop a trusted and honest relation. If it is true, on the one hand, that in the online environment social cues are reduced, it also true that it is not always negative: from artists point of view it means having the possibility to build a brand new identity or a multiplicity of identities (Stone, 1995; Turkle, 1996) with a lower degree of social risk (Curtis, 1997). The issue of online trust has not been deepened in this paper and it could be another interesting point of view for further researches, considering also that there no studies concerning online trust specifically in artists’ community online. More researches about artists and social and ethical behaviour in online communication should be brought up.
9. CONCLUSIONS

9.1. RELEVANCE OF THE RESEARCH

In general, answering to the main research question brings useful insights.
Firstly, as explained by DiMaggio at Al. (2001), it is important for sociology to address questions in the field of Internet and Society, especially because the Internet gives unique possibilities to integrate different modalities of communication and content, and this versatility makes it the main driver for the social change. These changes shape the technical and normative structure and the way people interact.
In a second place, the literature review revealed how the existing theory is focusing on the influence of the Internet in the art field just from the purely artistic point of view, missing a consistent description of the novelties regarding the managerial aspects. This research aims to bring the attention of this gap and partially fill it in.
In addiction, as stated by A. B. Eisner, Q. R. Jett and H. J. Korn (2006), “emerging industries segments can be useful to study because they represent a setting that tends to exhibit considerable ambiguity and uncertainty”69. The service offered by Wooloo fits in with a new trend of online art services, which has the potential to highly impact the art world current hiring mechanisms. The findings can be helpful for potential new entrant in order to understand the system, to other actors in the art field in order to understand the changes occurring at the moment and to Wooloo itself.
Another reason supporting the relevance of this paper is that the field taken in consideration, which includes both art and media, is one of the most active on the market, it is registering a positive trend thanks to modern high standard of affluence and cultural education (Codignola, 2010) and “new media workers are regarded as prefiguring the future of work” (Leadbeter & Oakley, 1999)70.
All the above listed reasons prove the research to be relevant and the findings to be pertinent and applicable.

70 See also Gill, 2002
9.2. CONCLUSION

The structured analysis confirmed that the Internet is having a wide and differentiated impact on the contemporary visual art labour market and, consequently, on the artistic careers. The World Wide Web is for real working towards the enhancement of the transparency in artistic careers and the disintermediation in job searching processes, although at the moment the Internet seems to be a necessary but not sufficient tool for the development of an artistic career.

This conclusion has been reached starting from a literature review about the impact of the Internet on society in general, due to missing literature about the specific subject. This review allowed the author and the reader to have a complete framework of the general impacts the Internet is having.

In a second place, the field of analysis, contemporary visual art market, has been delimited, thanks to further literature and theoretical studies, associated with primary and secondary data. The triangulation of theoretical research and data analysis permitted the detection of the effects the Internet is having specifically upon the contemporary visual art market according to the theory, and the formulation of three hypotheses about the impact of the Internet upon the inequalities that are affecting the development of artistic careers. The first hypothesis regards the re-intermediating power of the Internet, the second the impacts upon the level of embeddedness of the selection processes in the players’ personal network and the third one the strength of spatial concentration. The hypotheses have been tested through the use of the case study methodology.

In particular, the analysis - through observation, a questionnaire and a series of interviews - to the users of Wooloo.org, a symptomatic example of player in the field, allowed the author to accept the three hypotheses and conclude that:

- The Internet is likely to push a re-intermediation process in the art management field, creating the context for the birth of new sustainable/profitable managerial solutions dedicated to the artists;
- The Internet is likely to make the hiring system less embedded in artists' personal networks and more transparent, facilitating the access for emerging artists;
- The Internet is likely to have a disintermediating effect in the art labour market, affecting the proximity with crucial market makers and challenging the issue of location in the art market.

In particular, triangulating theories and findings allowed the author to generalize the
conclusions reached about Wooloo and answer to the research question:

_How is the Internet impacting the Art Labour Market Inequalities regarding the development of artists’ careers?_

To summarize, the World Wide Web is:

- increasing the dimension of artists’ network;
- improving artists’ networking abilities, allowing information integration and the development of an idiosyncratic career pattern;
- making the art world accessible to everybody;
- guaranteeing new visibility to artists enlarging potential audience;
- making artist become more and more self-organizing businessmen comparable to firms/businesses;
- opening up the market to internationalization (with the connected externalities, e.g. the increase of learning possibilities), changing the market from being divided in national markets relatively communicating among each other, to single markets heavily connected to form a worldwide system and, at the same time pushing towards the recomposition of global–local relations;
- allowing a more equal competition;
- increasing artists’ possibilities for self-promotion;
- causing disintermediation phenomena threatening the power of market-maker intermediaries;
- causing re-intermediation phenomena, allowing the entrance in the market of new players, e.g. Wooloo.org and the online development of traditional players;
- changing job-search techniques

In conclusion, from the interviews turned out that the effects of the Internet are visible and growing – and this is way the hypotheses had to be accepted - but personal network and spatial concentration are still important factors in the development of an artistic career. Despite reducing inequalities and having a dis/re-intermediating effect, the Internet does not achieve in completely eliminate information asymmetries and it is not a substitute of the traditional offline system.

In the art field the Internet effects are still weaker then in other artistic fields (e.g. music, publishing...), and it is possible to detect two possible explanations, that should be further investigated:
1) The Internet affects the entry level in the system, but it does not push artists towards the whole career pattern;

2) Gatekeeping structures in the field seem to have a high and irreplaceable value, also because they are exploiting the Internet potential.

It is as if the Internet is affecting the way people deal with these inequalities, giving them increased interaction possibilities, but not the inequalities themselves. However, the Internet has a huge potential to be exploited and it is not possible yet to predict whether or not this trend towards the growing importance of the Internet in the field will stay stable.
REFERENCES

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(79) Skov L. (Forthcoming) ‘It was a huge shock’: Fashion designers’ transition from school to work in Denmark, 1980s-2000s. The project was headed by Lise Skov while interviews were conducted by research assistants Andre Amtoft and David Sausdal. Data analysis was done by Lise Skov and David Sausdal. In addition to the two reports, they have had access to the raw survey data from Designskolen Kolding.


APPENDIX I – The QUESTIONNAIRE

“Dear Wooloo Member,

Wooloo is seeking to constantly improve the network and the possibilities of better connecting artists with art opportunities around the world. That is the reason why we would like to get to know your opinion by filling out this brief questionnaire. It will take you approximately 10 minutes.
All the data submitted will be surely handled with highest confidentiality.

Q1: Which category do you belong to?
☐ artist → go to Q4
☐ art institution → go to Q13 (the section has not been used for the purposes of this paper, therefore the section of the questionnaire has not been included)
☐ artist-in-residency programme → Q4

If selected art institution:

Q2: What kind of art institution do you belong to?
☐ Gallery
☐ Museum
☐ School
☐ Festival
☐ Art Show
☐ Exhibition Space
☐ Arts Foundation
☐ Grants Provider
☐ Other, please specify:

Q3: For how long have you been member on Wooloo.org?
☐ 0 month to 6 months
☐ 6 months to 1 year
☐ 1 year to 3 years
☐ more than 3 years
If selected in Q1 that they are an artist:

Q4: How often do you ...

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>More than once a day</th>
<th>Once a day</th>
<th>Once a week</th>
<th>Once a month</th>
<th>Once every 3 month</th>
<th>Less than every 3 months</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Log into your profile</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Look for new Open Calls / Residency programs</td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apply for OC/AIR</td>
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<tr>
<td>Look at other artists’ profiles</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Q5: How do you agree/disagree with the following statements:

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<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Completely disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Indifferent</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Completely Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>„Wooloo is my primary source to find Open Calls“</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>„Wooloo helps me keeping updated about art opportunities“</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>„Wooloo gives me the opportunity to present my work in an online gallery to a world wide audience“</td>
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<tr>
<td>Did any contact on Wooloo ever lead to concrete collaboration/projects with institutions?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>„Wooloo helps me finding other interesting artists for collaborative projects“</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Q6: How important is it for you to have the possibility to: (1 – not important at all, 2 – somewhat important., 3-neither important nor unimportant, 4 – important, 5 – very important)

<table>
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<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>To create your online portfolio with artworks and CV</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>To look at other artists’ work</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To connect/communicate with other artists *</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>To be able to promote your work (e.g. on the Wooloo front page, in the Wooloo newsletter) *</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
To find art opportunities that especially match with your profile
To search and apply for art residencies
To search and apply for exhibition opportunities
To search and apply for international grants
To search and apply for jobs
To find assistant jobs for acclaimed artists
To get free accommodation in capitals around the world for shorter periods of time

- If answered 3,4,5 at a respective question:

Q7: How much would you pay for this service per month (in USD): __________

Q8: “The Open Call notifications I receive from WOOLOO.ORG hit my preferences”: Please rate the following statement

☐ Strongly Agree
☐ Agree
☐ Neither Agree Nor Disagree
☐ Disagree
☐ Strongly Disagree

Q9: Have you ever applied to Open Calls thanks to the Open Call notifications?

☐ Yes
☐ No

Imagine the following scenario: Wooloo.org gives you the choice between a basic and a premium profile. The basic profile implies free access to Wooloo.org, a free creation of your
artist portfolio and an overview about existing opportunities in the art world without providing you with contact details. The premium profile additionally gives you the possibility to access further information (e.g. contact details) about art opportunities, to apply for interesting offers and to promote your artwork for a discounted price.

Q10: Would you stop using Wooloo if Wooloo implemented this subscription model?
   - [ ] Yes
   - [ ] No
   - [ ] I don’t know

Q11: How much would you be willing to pay per month to upgrade to your profile to the premium service (in USD)? _________________

Q12: If the membership fee for one year would be 20$, how likely would it be that you upgrade your profile to the premium one?
   (On a Scale from 1 to 5: 1 – Very unlikely, 5 – Very Likely)

**GENERAL DATA**

Age:
Nationality:

Gender:
Monthly Income:

Do you consider your artwork as the main source of income?
   - [ ] Yes
   - [ ] No
   - [ ] I don’t know

How did you find out about Wooloo?
☐ Search Engine
☐ Personal Network
☐ Festival/Events/Exhibition
☐ Direct e-mail from the Wooloo Team
☐ Others, please specify: ___________________

Do you have any comments/suggestions that you would like to share with the Wooloo Team?
APPENDIX II – The INTERVIEWS

Hi,

These are the questions I would like you to answer. I promise it is not going to take you so much time. I am going to use the results of these online interviews in my thesis (that is not going to be published), do you agree to be named on that?

☐ I agree    ☐ I disagree

Name

Age

Art Field

Is art your main profession?

Where do you live?

1) How do you usually contact gallerists and exhibitors?

• You contact employment agencies
• You ask friends or relatives
• You contact school employment centers
• You contact employer directly sending résumé and application through mail
• You contact employer directly sending résumé and application through e-mail
• You reply to ads you found offline
• You reply to ads you found online
• You browse online art communities (e.g. Wooloo)
• Other, please specify …………………

2) If you think about your art social network – artists or other people in the art world you collaborate/share information with – how it has been formed?
• People you studied with
• People you met in the work field
• Friends
• People that live/work in your geographical area and that attend the same places you do
• People you met online

3) How long have you been on Wooloo?

4) Did Wooloo and the Internet in general help you to have an easier access to information about exhibitions, grants and residencies program?

5) How do you use Wooloo?

   e.g. you just browse artists profiles or you actively interact and send apply for jobs?

6) Did Wooloo increase the dimension of your professional network?

   e.g. you have more international contacts (did you have a lot of international contacts before Wooloo?), more artists you consult or collaborate with, more opportunities to exhibit your work…

7) Can you please describe me your experience with Wooloo? What do you expect from a network like this? Does Wooloo meet your expectations? Have you ever had a concrete job experience through it?

8) In the art field, how important is it to “know someone”? Do you think that Wooloo and other initiatives on the Internet are or are not helping in increasing the opportunities for everyone, even for less introduced people?

9) How important is to live in a cultural centre/city?
10) Do you think the Internet, and initiatives like Wooloo, make it easier to “get discover” and to start a career in the art world?

11) Do you think the Internet and Wooloo make it easier to manage your own career in a more flexible and independent way?

12) Did you notice any significant change in the artistic careers management since the Internet started diffusing?