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Networked Artist-in-Residence Programs in the Networked Contemporary Art System



The former South Congregational Church in Carroll Gardens, Brooklyn, hosts Residency Unlimited (RU)'s headquarter, where the author first started developing her research.

Overview

Giorgia Gandolfini's MA dissertation in Arts Management from the **University of Bologna (Italy)** investigates the role that **artist-in-residence programs play in the artistic and professional development of today's artists**. The research wants to address the lack of related literature on residency programs, with the goal to provide a thoughtful analysis on their impact in the contemporary art system by drawing from social sciences research.

Research topics and results

The present study investigates the role of artist-in-residence programs in the contemporary art system from a network studies perspective. Although being little known, sometimes completely unfamiliar, to those outside the professional art community, artist-in-residence programs reveal to play a subtle yet essential role in the artistic and professional development of artists nowadays.

The research focused specifically on the analysis of international artist-in-residence programs for visual artists, with a special focus on US-based organizations – due to the resources most easily accessible by the candidate. In-person interviews were conducted as the primary method for data collection. As originally interviews served to gain an overview of different managerial models in the field, it later emerged that there is one single operating model, where – often informal – networks of relationships assume a key importance in the existence and functioning of such programs.

Three propositions have been formulated. (1) Artist-in-residence are platforms for the artists to limit environmental uncertainty; (2) artist-in-residence programs could be seen as brokerage nodes within the contemporary art system; (3) artist-in-residence programs are catalyst for social and intellectual capital.

Motivation for research

The study was the result of the candidate's working experience at Brooklyn-based Residency Unlimited Inc. – an international artist-in-residence program for interdisciplinary artists. During this period, she was put closely in touch with an enclosed yet lively community, whose functioning dynamics were the initial object of her observations.

Contribution to the field

For what was known at the time of the dissertation, this was the first study that considered the case of artist-in-residence programs from a social science perspective and analyzed their role in the contemporary art sector accordingly. Resulting propositions might assume relevance for professionals operating in the field, as they analyze the role of residencies from an academic perspective and contribute to the already existing documentation with a study from such a peculiar angle, and for academics in social science field interested in the contemporary art sector, as it sheds light on the existence, role and dynamics of an actor (artist-in-residence programs) which had not been seriously considered yet.

Key learnings

It is important to underline that actors who navigate a market characterized by unique and symbolic goods such as that of contemporary visual art must rely on an extended entanglement of social relationships to face uncertainty. In this sense, artist-in-residence programs leverage the potential for resident artists to expand and diversify their own ego-network. Moving from the analysis of practical cases, such as that of Brooklyn-based Residency Unlimited Inc., three propositions have been formulated. (1) Artist-in-residence programs are platforms for the artists to limit environmental

uncertainty. Thanks to a combined action of *networking-in-residence* and *residence hopping*, artists manage to decrease ambiguity by gaining a larger perspective from which scanning potential opportunities. (2) Artist-in-residence programs are *brokerage nodes* within the contemporary art system. In particular, residencies act as *liaison*, that is an intermediary between previously disconnected actors belonging to different social networks, and additionally implementing a synthesis functions as they encourage and support the production of a unique work of art. Artists thus would benefit from the brokerage position of residency programs as it connects them to different social networks from a privileged position. Moreover, residencies provide not only a stimulating and diverse environment for the artists to generate innovative ideas, but also they recreate a supportive and cohesive one to actually implement them. Descending from this, it derives that (3) artist-in-residence programs are catalyst for social and intellectual capital.

Giorgia Gandolfini is a practitioner and independent researcher in the field of art residencies and artistic interventions in organizational contexts. Her interest focuses on the way artistic practices facilitate educational processes and trigger innovation. Giorgia manages and curates DIALOGUES – an online open platform of published critical and theoretical content on the evolving field of art residencies – at Brooklyn-based Residency Unlimited (RU), an international residency program for interdisciplinary artists. In early 2018, she co-founded TAP The Artist is Present (Milan). To date, she and her team have managed to engage almost 200 people in site-specific artistic interventions inside private organizations from a variety of different industries. Projects focus on the themes of creativity, empathy and innovation. She worked in program and administration roles in different residency programs operating at an international level, such as Residency Unlimited (New York City), Careof (Milan) and Ramdom (Lecce). Giorgia obtained a Master's degree in Arts Management from the University of Bologna (Italy). She also holds a BA in Contemporary and Modern Art History. As a visiting student, she studied at Ludwig-Maximilians Universität in Munich (Germany) and Carnegie Mellon University in Pittsburgh (United States).

You can read the dissertation in full [here](#).