

I aim to check the impact of meritocratic versus relational factors in getting a job in fields of unclear criteria of assessment and harsh labour market, using the case study of visual arts in Poland. I will verify the hypothesis that the difficult labour market promotes relational factors. Visual arts have been chosen as an extreme case that should render two phenomena more visible: arbitrariness (evaluation criteria embedded in taste and attitude that increase the risk of turning personal proclivities into formal assessment) and harsh labour market (small size, huge surplus of supply over demand, high unemployment, large share of unpaid work) but also a field that actors are unlikely to leave due to nonfinancial factors, such as ambition or self-identification).

To the best of my knowledge, this will be the first research showing differences between people who did and did not get a job on a harsh labour market with arbitrary criteria of assessment in Poland. It will also be the first academic presentation of a data which are unusually vast as for studying artists in Poland (966 questionnaires, around 700 pages of verbatim transcript). The project will show relative importance of meritocratic and relational factors as well as meanings that actors ascribe to these categories in a field where merit is increasingly difficult to define. The project will also contribute to the debate on meritocracy (by tackling the question of how to sustain the ideal of meritocracy in vocations with arbitrary criteria of assessment) and on labour supply (by countering assumptions about next to zero labour supply in markets with labour price next to zero by showing their inadequacy for markets with high vocational motivation).