

# The Music Puzzle:

EXPLORING BOOKING PRACTICES IN EUROPE



LIVE  
DMA



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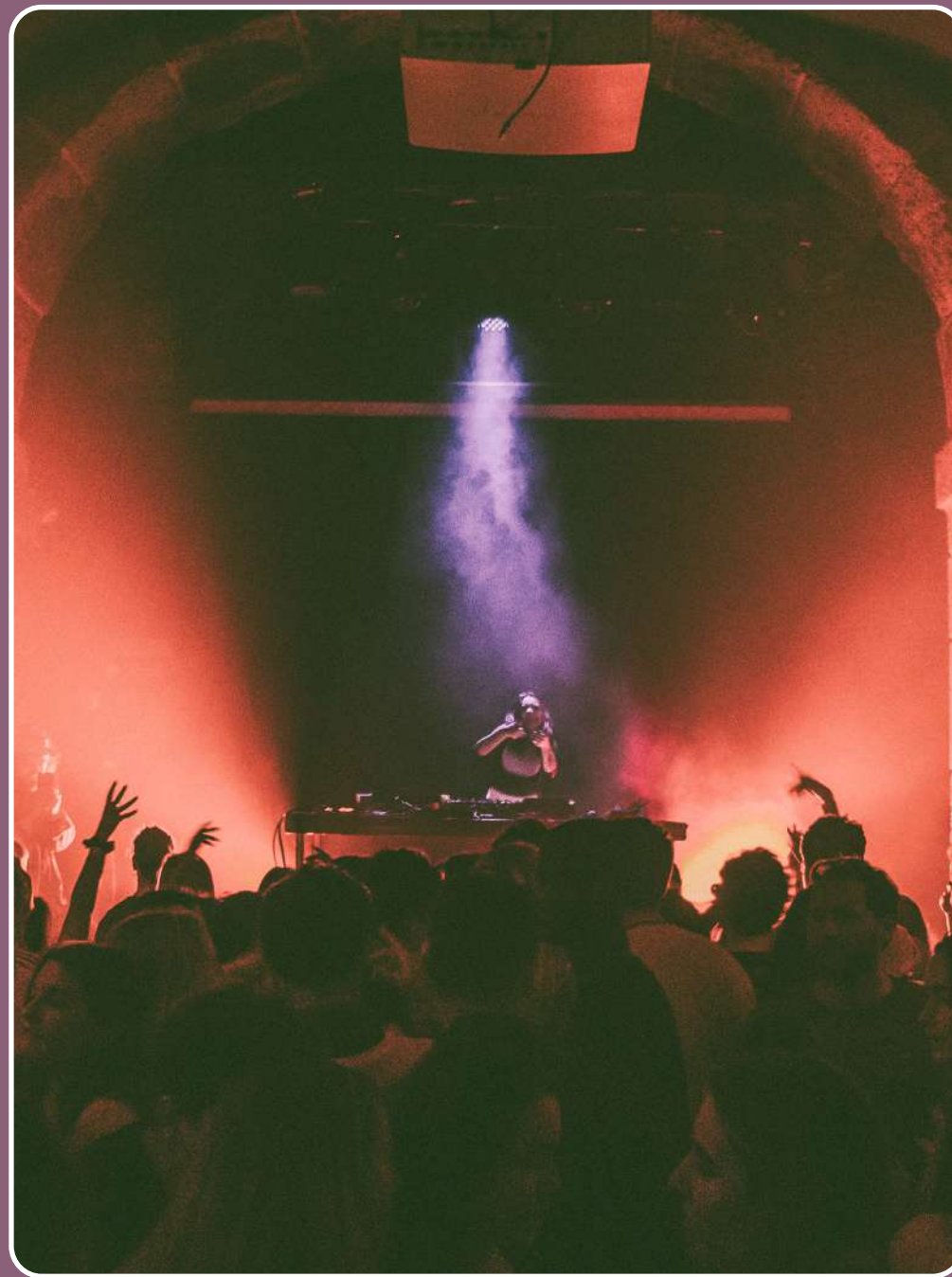
# INTRODUCTION

Who are the bookers? What do they do?  
How do they work? With whom?

Programming practices in the cultural field have arisen as a research object during the last 15 years, being investigated for and through their peculiar situation at the intersection between economic and artistic fields. Bookers have to manage their way between a variety of tasks, partnerships and responsibilities conferring them a key role in the musical landscape: they do evolve where art meets commerce, but also where artists meet audiences, and where access meets outreach.

The European network Live DMA represents over 2280 music venues and clubs in Europe, scattered over 16 countries. For this new study, Live DMA sought inspiration within on-going academic works tackling booking practices, but also within a Working Group they hosted in early 2021, when the whole sector was still shaken by the Covid-19 pandemic. The multiple gigs and tours cancellations, the rebooking patterns, and the jam they provoked when live music started to resume, put the bookers in the spotlight, along with their responsibilities.

These working groups gathered 15 bookers from different European countries, during which the wish for fairer practices within the booking community was acknowledged. The final objective of this research is then to be an incentive towards a European Fair Practice Code, which drafting implies more transparency but also a better understanding of this role. As such, this study aims to give an overview of who the bookers from Live DMA are, to investigate their daily tasks, to highlight the main challenges of live music programming, to identify the main partners bookers work with, to allow for more transparency within these operators, and eventually to pave the way for more social and artistic diversity.



# METHODOLOGY

The methodology behind this study was meant to rely on both a quantitative and a qualitative perspective. The research process had to be as open as possible, so it started with a diversified communication regarding the research project, its methods and possible outputs, which was circulated within the network. This information campaign included a registration link so the interested bookers could partake in the research process. 90 registrations were totalized, emanating from bookers across the whole Live DMA network.

In the meantime, a survey totalizing up to 82 questions was elaborated, most of said questions being formulated through boxes to tick or labels to hierarchise to erase as many potential language barriers as possible, while offering text boxes to offer more insights when needed / wished. The questionnaire was divided into six main categories: the sociological indicators, the musical background, the educational and professional path, the current job description, the venue description, and the programme description.

The questionnaire was launched in June 2023 and remained activated for 5 months, while weekly reminders were sent out, along with personalized reminders from the national Survey coordinators from the Live DMA network.

A few extra articles published within Live DMA newsletter later, 30 full answers to the questionnaire were totalized, among the initial 90 registrations, and hence still reaching a saturation point. A first round of analysis was then conducted, allowing to determine a suitable methodology for the qualitative insights Live DMA aimed to collect from the bookers. The last question of the questionnaire was asking the bookers whether they would be willing to further their participation into the research with a short qualitative interview: 15 of them agreed and were contacted to schedule an interview, and 9 in-depth interviews have been held.

The qualitative questionnaire was navigating between free and semi-directive interviews, with large topics to discuss from (own definition and connection to booking, with its ups and downs, success and failures, their schedule and organisation, their tools and technical needs, their selection protocols and influences, their work partners...)

**The results displayed in this study<sup>1</sup> are to be considered as an overview of booking practices that are being held in Europe. They are a starting point meant to open up the debate and share further experiences, work habits, feelings, concerns...**

**They do not claim to be extensive or representative of a community made of very disparate realities. Instead, they are meant to be mobilized as a tool or base to elaborate from, and they call for futures endeavours.**

.....  
1. We still chose to present part of our results through percentages, for an easier grasp of the answers.



31 FAM, Sala Barts in Barcelona © Carles Rodríguez

# THE PUZZLE METAPHOR

During said interviews, a metaphor surfaced: several of the bookers, when asked to describe about the way they were building their programmes, spontaneously used a puzzle metaphor:

*“So I kind of have this big puzzle with the some larger names, and some smaller names, and when it’s all put together, then I have some holes to fill.”*

*“It’s kind of a puzzle, because we have our strategy: (...) we have to do these large concerts, and we have to do the very small concerts, and we have to, kind of, reach all the audience in the local area, from the older people, to children and the young people, and also kind of reach a lot of different channels... So it’s kind of this big puzzle, that has to look good at the end. (...) It’s kind of a Sudoku ensemble, yeah.”*

Upon noticing the pattern, we then asked the rest of the interrogated panel whether they were relating to this image when they were not bringing it up themselves. Almost all of them agreed that it was a pretty accurate depiction of their work, and we decided to extend the metaphor during this whole study since it was alleviating one of its biggest challenge: it allowed to disconnect for a while very tied together and embedded work patterns by focusing on the different pieces that make it complete, allowing us to better understand what’s at the core of the booking practices to better comprehend the big picture that venues’ programme represent.



# PIECE 1

Who are the European bookers?  
Meet the puzzlers

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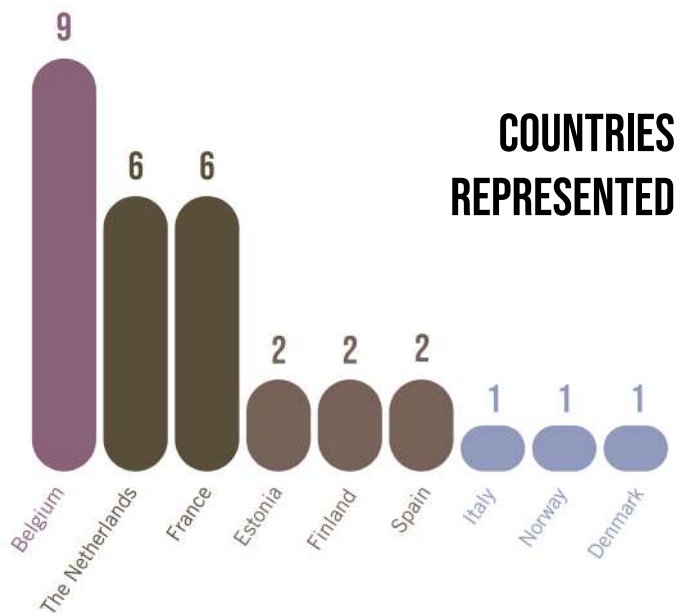
*This is kind of a longer story, I'm afraid. I thought about this question a lot over the last eight years because the first few years I really was thinking, is this the right job for me? Do I want this? I can feel that I'm good at my job. We're getting the results. I like music, obviously, so it has some advantages, but the pressure is so high, it takes such a toll on my life. Is this what I want?"*

# PIECE 1 *Meet the puzzlers: who are the European bookers?*

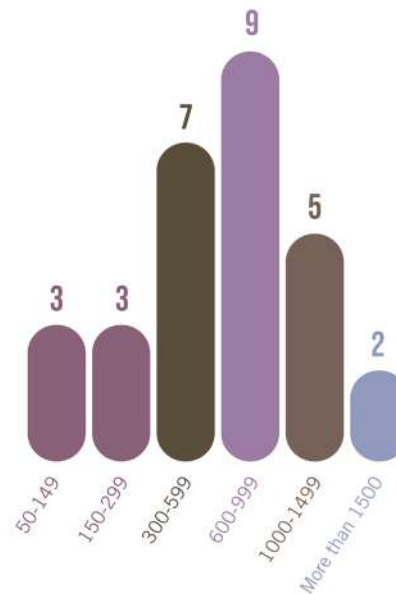
The results displayed in this study are based upon the participation of 30 bookers, working in 30 different popular music venues, scattered over 9 European countries. The results that are provided over the following pages are rooted within the Live DMA network, each participating booker working for one of the 2280 live music venues represented by the network.

However, even if the selection process of the participating bookers was meant to keep this study Live DMA-based, the insights they gave along the way may be representative of a broader reality: 1 out of 3 participating bookers works for several venues and festivals, combining up to 5 booking positions at the time of the investigation.

When that was the case, they were asked to answer the questions based on their experience within their venue part of the Live DMA network so the data collected keeps its anchorage within the European network, but the broader picture depicted in this research is necessarily informed by the past or simultaneous work experiences that each booker has to their credit, some of them probably being undertaken out of the network's reach.



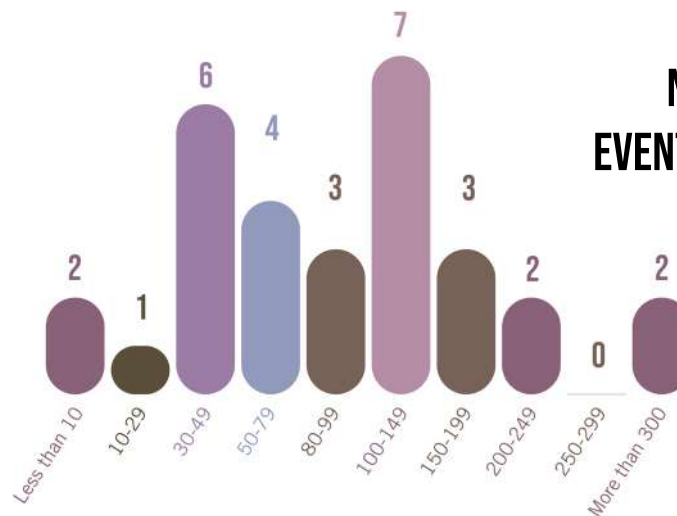
## CAPACITIES OF THE VENUES



The venues represented in the study come with a variety of sizes and formats, offering one or several concert halls, with a total capacity going from 50 to more than 1500, with a predominance in this study of medium sized venues with a capacity situated anywhere between 300 and 1000, which concerns half of the participants. This discrepancy in capacity is echoed by a discrepancy in activity, since the number of events booked over the course of 12 months<sup>2</sup> goes anywhere from less than 10 to more than 300.

.....  
2. The results are representative of 12 months of activity hosted between January 2022 to December 2023, following either the civil year format or the season format, according to the bookers' preferred period of reference.

## NUMBER OF EVENTS BOOKED



# PIECE 1

 Meet the puzzlers: who are the European bookers?

The sociological insights collected were mainly tackling the age, gender, and geographical origins of the participating bookers. The latter did not underline any specific pattern of international mobility, every respondent being currently working in the country they were born in, with one exception. However, their personal path regularly mentions a stay in another country, either as a student or as an early career professional, suggesting an openness to international cooperation.

## A MAJORITY OF MALE, OVER 30'S BOOKERS

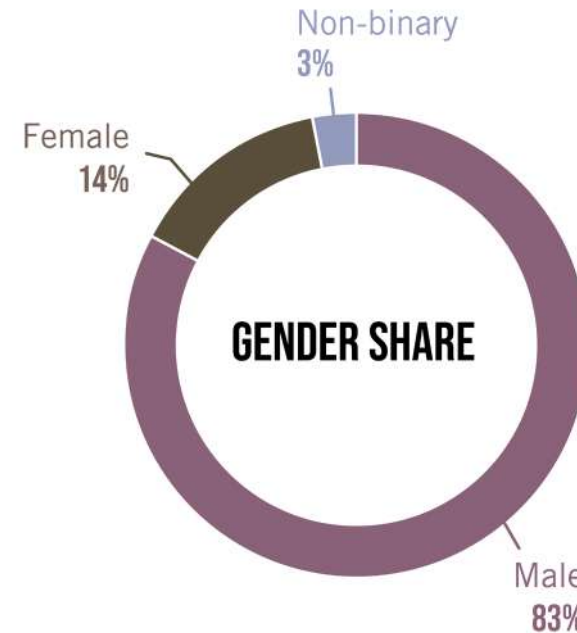
The demographic of the study nevertheless shed light over two major kinds of disparities. The first one is about gender representation: among the 30 respondents, 83% identify as male, 14% as female, and 3% as non-binary, displaying a **large predominance of men within the position**, confirming the national statistics provided by the national networks such as [VNPF](#) (The Netherlands) or [Fedelima](#) (France), pointing at a massive gender disparity among music venues, with management, booking and technical positions being much more occupied by men while administration, communication or outreach positions are more occupied by women. The topic seems systematic, as one of the female participants to the study explains:



*I like working with Danish upcoming artists. It's been a big priority for me, and also, another big priority, is the gender balance. I don't know if that's the same everywhere in Europe, but in Denmark it's a big issue. (...)*

*And we are, I think we are 19 venues of this kind in Denmark and I'm the only female booker and manager, so it's kind of a big issue for me and it's something I have been working hard with, trying to raise the focus on the gender equality.<sup>3</sup>*

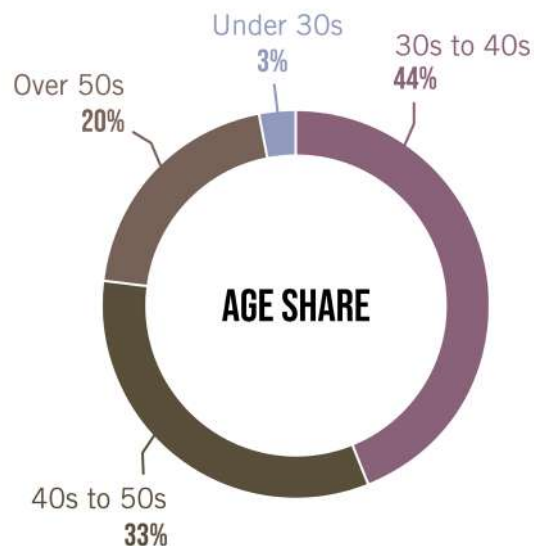
<sup>3</sup> For further references about gender disparities in the live music sector, please consult Live DMA's website





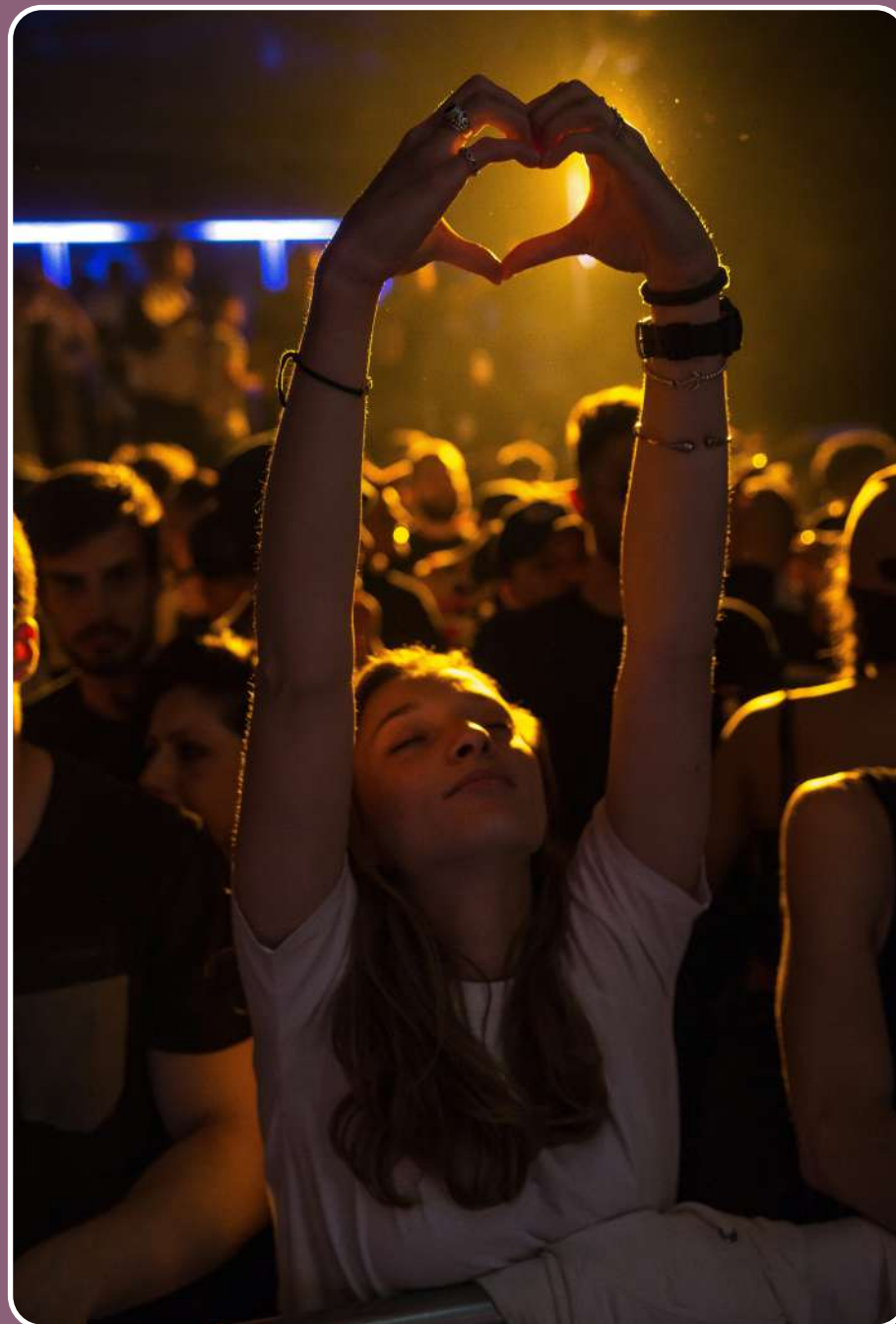
# PIECE 1

Meet the puzzlers: who are the European bookers?



In the same time, figures tend to show a balanced share of age representation, at the exception of **bookers under 30's who only represent 3% of the panel**. This result might be correlated to the typology of venues represented in this research: several of them are established institutions, and thus possibly not the go-to venues, more community-based, in which younger or aspiring music professional first turns to when starting a career. But it may also suggest that booking duties are not to be undertaken, or easily accessible, from an early age or for an early career music professional. The panel is then rather experienced, and speaks with perspective: two of the participating bookers are rather new to booking, with less than 2 years of booking experience, while the 28 others are more settled into the activity, ranging from 3 to 35 years of booking career.

This lack of younger bookers in the panel might stem from a blind spot within the music industry formal education and training: there seems to be no formal degree or education program focusing on booking practices, probably enjoining aspiring bookers to take charge of other duties within music venues (administration, production, tour management...) before switching or narrowing down to booking at a later stage of their career: indeed, two thirds of the panel mentioned that they formerly occupied positions within the music industry that encompassed no booking duties at all ([see page 17](#)).



# PIECE 2

Becoming a music lover:  
The first puzzle

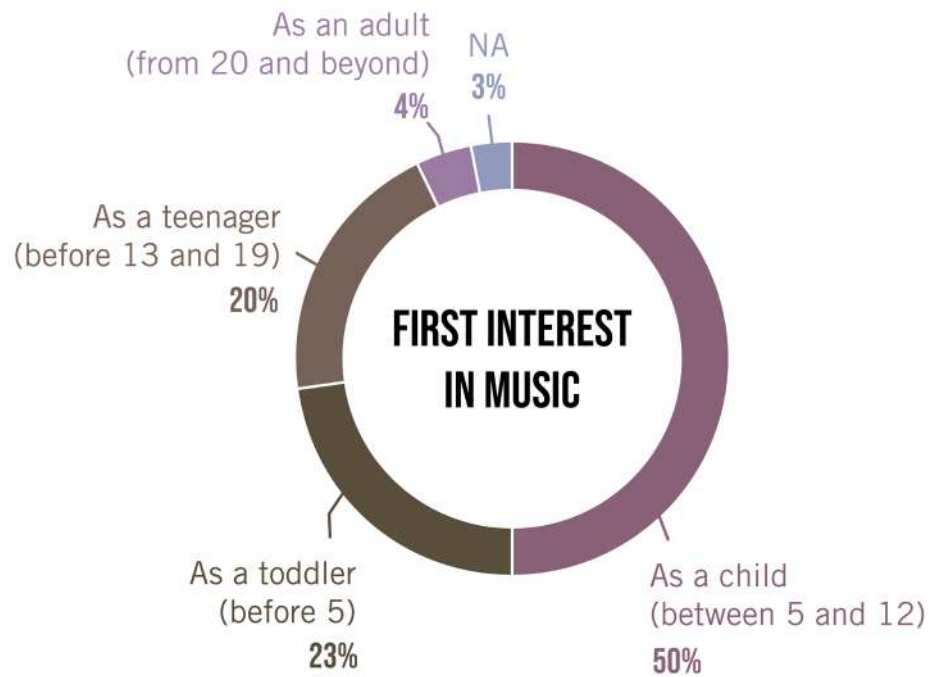
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*You don't end up in this job if you don't love live music or if you're not interested in the music. Like most of the people I know who work in this industry had some kind of involvement in the live industry before they started to actually work in it. Like people who organized shows in their spare time, or played in a band, or had some kind of interests in the field. And then, when you start doing this job, it's kind of like, your free time and your job just flows together."*

# PIECE 2

The first puzzle: becoming a music lover



Entrepôt in Arlon © Loïc Warin

## AN EARLY SOCIALIZATION TO MUSIC

Working in (the) music (industry) is often synonym of a passion-driven, heart-felt career. The notion has been greatly developed through the scope of artistic labour itself, within the music field and beyond: musicians, actors, visual artists... The same goes with the careers of the ones who are not directly under the spotlight: managers, administration and production officers, agents... And hence, possibly bookers.

Getting to know the European bookers then implied a focus upon their relationship with music. Part of the questionnaire sent out to the investigated panel was then aiming to search for the roots of the bookers' connection to music.

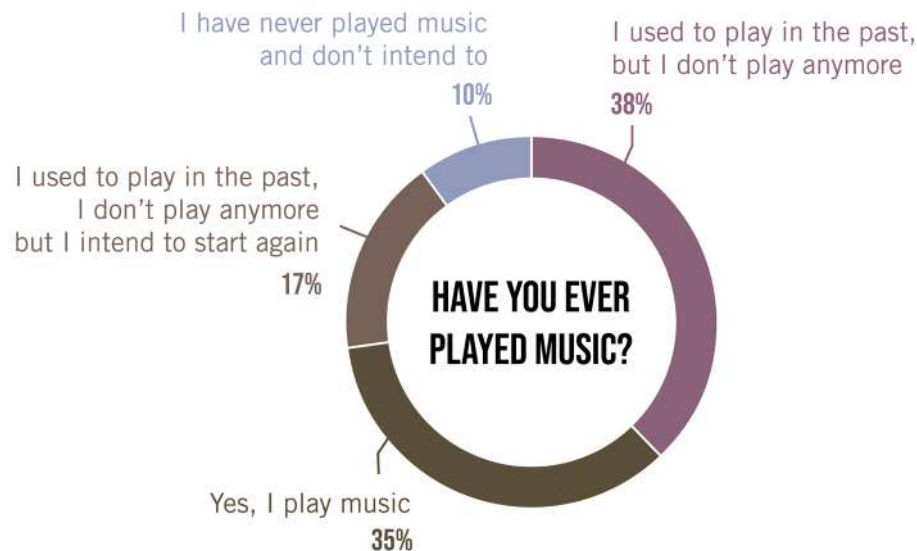
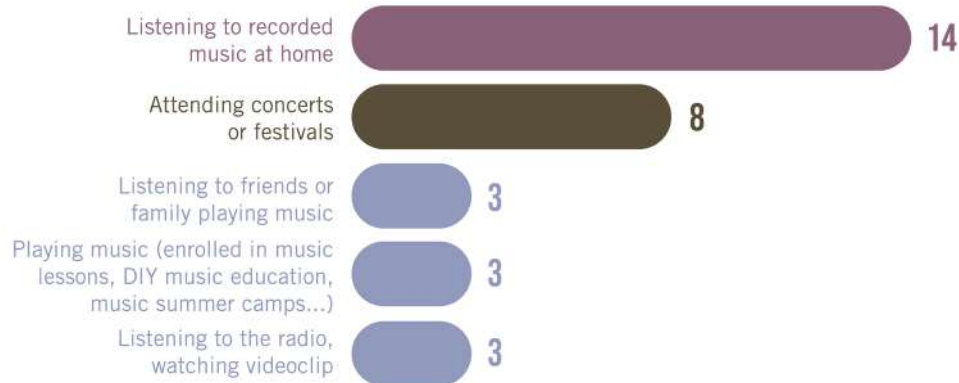
As it is recurrent among the artistic field workers, **a clear majority of the bookers date their earliest interest in music back to a very young age**: 73% of them declare having developed an interest, and possibly a taste for music **before the age of 12**, with 23% estimating having developed such an interest as a toddler, before they even turn 5. Still, 20% of the participating bookers have gotten attracted to music as teenagers, anywhere between 13 and 19 year-old. In addition, 3% of the bookers declare not remembering when they first connected with music.

Although the questionnaire didn't allow to collect further details upon these foggy memories, the qualitative interviews seem to connect this blurriness with a sense of "it has always been there" feeling, depicting bookers whose taste for music didn't come out of a particular trigger, but rather out of a constant immersion in a musical environment.



# PIECE 2 *The first puzzle: becoming a music lover*

## DEVELOPING AN INTEREST FOR MUSIC



## A MULTIFACETED CONNECTION TO MUSIC: LISTENING, ATTENDING, PLAYING

The bookers were then invited to reflect upon the trigger behind their connection to music. This is where the first kind of music puzzle comes up: **the interest for music never developed through a unique source**, but through a combination of 2 to 6 different leads.

For most of the bookers, the first connection with music comes from an attendee position: they got into music listening to it (playing CDs at home, attending concerts or festivals, listening to the radio, watching videoclips...) more than directly playing music. The bookers hence testify of a “musicked” position that comes prior to a potential “musicking” position<sup>4</sup>, as Christopher Small words it.

Beyond that, even if the 1st attachment to music develops through a receptive posture, the majority of the participating bookers have further their connection with music by exploring it from a musicking perspective : **90% play or have played music themselves**. 35% still play music on a regular basis, while 55% used to play in the past but haven't done so in a while, a third of them saying they would be inclined into resuming their musical practice.

Among the bookers who developed their own music-making, the majority also have a performer experience: 14 of them mention that they often play(ed) to an audience, while 7 others would also play for spectators, but in a more punctual way. Moreover, this music-making experiences were mostly collective ones: 70% of the bookers add that they play(ed) in at least one regular band, or that they would more punctually join a band or another musician. Only 3 of them developed a more personal, intimate music-making, in the comfort and secret of their homes.

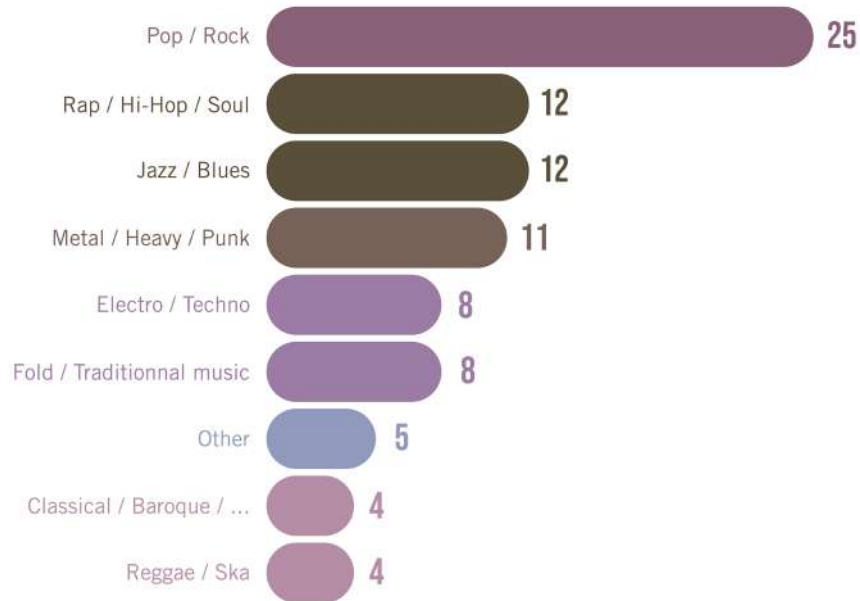
4. Small, Christopher (2011). Musicking: The Meanings of Performing and Listening (Music Culture), Hanover: Wesleyan University Press.



# PIECE 2

*The first puzzle: becoming a music lover*

## FAVORITE MUSICAL GENRES



In Norway © Helge brekke

## A PREDOMINANCE OF POP-ROCK LOVERS

The music puzzle continues when exploring the bookers' personal musical tastes. If it was foreseeable that no one would dedicate their whole musical experiences to a unique musical genre, the results suggest that the **bookers' have a rather eclectic approach to music**: half of the panel inventories a minimum of 8 musical genres that they regularly listen to and / or play themselves, while they could have picked just one or two options.

Among the most ranked musical genres that tease the bookers' tastes, **pop and/or rock music, rap, hip-hop and/or soul, jazz and/ or blues** are the ones with the more occurrences.

These very first encounters with music hence tends to demonstrate an ability to combine music pieces together: the bookers met throughout this research process all assess that **their relationship with music is plural**: if it is their music-listening experiences that is the more recurrent starting point, said music-listening emerges from different paths (CDs, videos, radios, live gigs...) that are experimented in very different contexts (in the comfort of their home with potential disparities in the degree of focus allowed to the listening process; in front of a screen through a music to the image perspective; during a commute, etc.).

However, Sophie Maisonneuve and Antoine Hennion have demonstrated that there is no such thing as a passive listener<sup>5</sup>: either way, these earliest steps with music assuredly contribute to shape the bookers' connection to music, that has then been doubled down by a more performative approach when they undertook playing music themselves. In addition, they display very eclectic musical tastes, depicting an emerging but yet very colourful music puzzle.

.....  
5. Hennion, Antoine, Sophie. Maisonneuve & Émilie Gomart (2000). Figures de l'amateur. Formes, objets, pratiques de l'amour de la musique aujourd'hui, Paris : La Documentation française.

# PIECE 3

Composing an educational & professional background :  
The second puzzle

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*In Denmark anyway, there's a lot of volunteer booking experience to get, and that's how I started myself, by being a volunteer in this. In this business, it's a great way to get some experience: because it's important that you have a wide experience".*

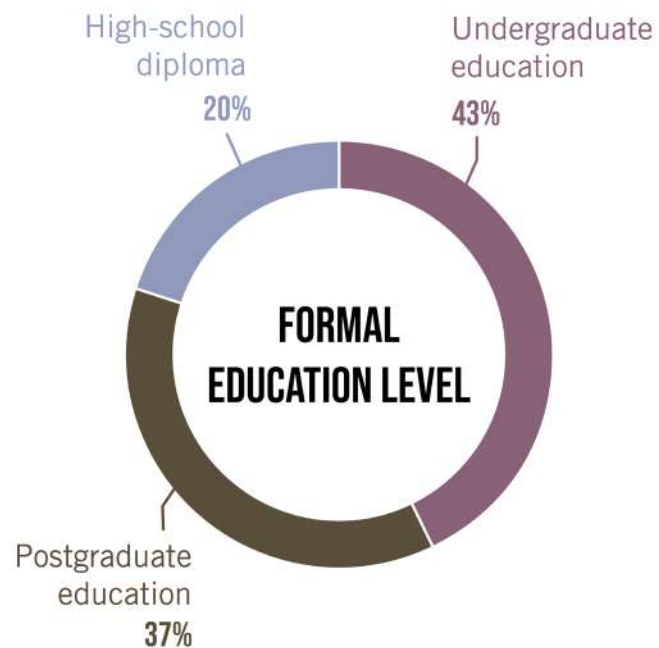
# PIECE 3

The second puzzle: composing an Educational & Professional background

Another puzzle emerges when investigating the educational and professional background that the bookers display. They demonstrate **heterogeneous formal education level**, from high school diploma to postgraduate degrees, indicating that there is no degree requirement to enter a booking position.

More importantly, the paths leading to these positions within music are themselves puzzled, as the participating bookers mention that their education path was not necessarily paving the way for their current booking position. Their curriculum rather **display a combination of majors**, and for good reason: booking doesn't seem to be a major in itself. So even if the specific role of booking within the music sector was a calling for some of the bookers, **they could not enrol for a specific degree due to a lack of dedicated program.**

Among the 30 participants in the investigated panel, only 3 bookers mentioned to have studied booking practices during their curriculum, for their training did have a class about it, among other courses.



# PIECE 3

## The second puzzle: composing an Educational & Professional background

### DIVERSE FIELDS OF STUDY

Even if composing a training path out of diverse and potentially complementary fields and skills could be undertaken completely voluntarily, the **lack of specific program appears prejudicial for 16% of them, who mentioned that they did not study booking practices for they “could not find a dedicated program”**.

Thus, the interrogated panel shows a very diverse set of skills, some having graduated from a very different field from music (including electricity, electronic, education / teaching, building and land survey, bank, chemistry, theology, psychology, social assistance, Spanish language and tourism management), some having chosen a more transversal approach (applied or commercial economics, marketing, communication, media studies), while the majority opted for an art or culture-related programme but through a broader perspective, not necessarily including a booking / curating course (from cultural entrepreneurship or management to music, musicology and music management, visual arts, performing arts or art video). **Although half of the panel regrets not having been able to enroll in a booking course, the mix-and-match of majors and skills that they put together instead is frequently described as an asset by bookers on the job.**

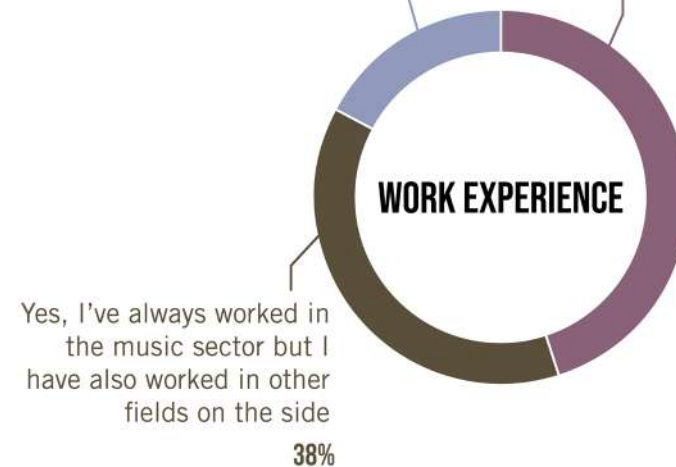


*There's a lot of possibilities of getting close to booking. I think a lot of people in my position would like to have some people coming in with another background."*

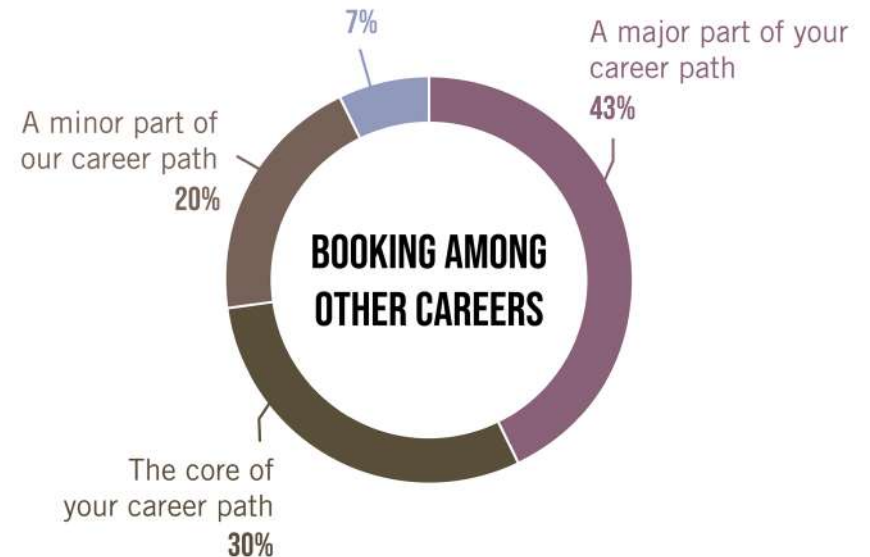
Beyond graduation, another combination of different pieces comes to light, albeit this time the puzzle is within the working world. Only 17% of the bookers have devoted, or have been able to devote their whole career to the music sector only. Indeed, **45% of them have worked in a completely different field before entering a music-related position**, in line with the fields of study previously described (although their daily job was not pertaining to the music sector, they might have already pursued a music-related commitment on the side, as a volunteer). The rest of the panel indicates a mixed professional background, having juggled between music and another sector alongside for a while (i.e. combining an internship in a venue or a festival while sustaining a “day-job” in another sector, etc.)

Yes, I've always / only worked in the music sector 17%

No, I've worked in another sector before 45%



I am not sure 7%





# PIECE 3

*The second puzzle: composing an Educational & Professional background*

## DIVERSE MUSIC-RELATED POSITIONS

Narrowing the scope of investigation further, we notice that once the bookers secure their position within the music sector, booking activities do not seem to constitute a one and only way to shape their involvement with music, since 1 booker out of 4 either has trouble to quantify the weight of booking within their professional journey (hence demonstrating that booking does not represent a constant or a main component of their working experience) or perceive it as a minor component of their career.

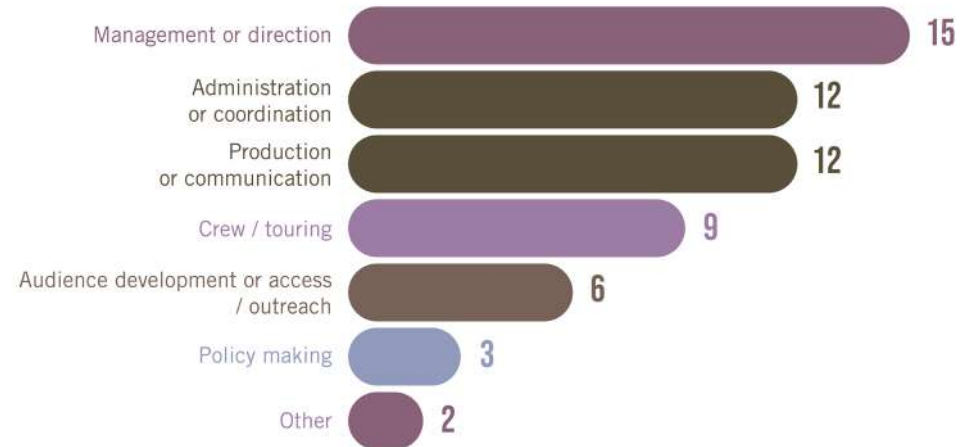
However, **the majority of the panel states that booking has always represented at least a major part of the career path (43%), if not its very core (30%).** Among these 30%, we encounter the same bookers who had mentioned having undertaken a curriculum with no booking focus for they “could not find a dedicated programme”, implying that they would have enrolled if such course had been available.

When discussing their previous work experiences within the music industry, **bookers indicate having already worked in a variety of departments:** management, administration, production, and communication being the most recurrent ones. Three things prevail:

- The predominance of the general and transversal positions formerly occupied, especially leading roles;
- The lesser connection with an audience based or political agenda making positions;
- The fact that a booker works, on average, within 2,36 departments during their career<sup>6</sup>.

.....  
6. The “other” category combines two sales position: ticketing and CDs.

## BESIDES BOOKING: WORK EXPERIENCES



Atelier Rock in Huy, France © Quentin Perot

# PIECE 3

## The second puzzle: composing an Educational & Professional background

As much as displaying a diverse background tends to be promoted by bookers on the job, the same positive comments also goes for the mix-and-match of music-related positions, as it is considered as a key to successful booking practices. When asked about the piece of advice he would grant to an early career or aspiring booker, one the respondent said:

“My main piece of advice would be to make sure that you get to see every part of putting on a show: the installation, the promotion, the press stuff and all these sub tasks of putting on a show. It's important to understand every small part of it, you have to understand how production works and you have to understand how promotion works and how you reach your audience.”

During the interviews, another hint came out as confirming that booking does not seem to constitute a life-long career: if bookers mainly start from another sector or another department, **they usually don't anticipate the future with a booking perspective in mind**, which might constitute a source of anxiety.

When asked about where they would see themselves in 10 years, they mostly confess that they would not picture themselves working as a booker up until retirement. The first reason implied for a switch of career deals with mental and physical health, because they feel the workload and the rhythm that the position requires is not sustainable when aging:

“I can't see myself, at 64, up all night at the electro nights. I don't want that at all. I've been doing this for 17 years, and I honestly think that I won't go up until 20 years of experience. It's mostly due to working nights, but also due to the stress, even though I am way less stressed nowadays than what I used to be. I put things into perspective more easily now. No one is gonna die if I don't reply straight away to an email.”

The second reason is more about the feeling of disconnection that might grow between a booker and the targeted audience:

“So I'm 36 now. I could do this when I'm 46, that wouldn't be an issue, but I'm not going to be able to do it until my retirement (...) You do feel that there's like an expiring date to the job that I do, if you want to keep it interesting for a young audience. I do notice that there are people there, that have done the booking job for like 30,35 years, and it's not to be negative about somebody else's work, but you do notice that you don't get the most interesting or the most refreshing programming from someone who is trying to book for a younger audience, when they're not part of that audience anymore.”

However, and since often “music has always been there”, it seems that music might always be there, even after booking. When asked about what kind of positions the bookers might consider undertaking after booking, even though there is room for another sector to step in, an evolution within the field seems the favourite option:

“What would my career plan be after this? I honestly have no idea. But it's something that I do talk about when people who are in, like similar positions as me, because it feels like the only way to evolve. It's to evolve to, like, another position in the same organization, to start to coordinate the whole organization or something. I'm pretty confident that there's something that's gonna, like, end up on my path, but I have no idea what it would be.”



# PIECE 4

Dealing with a transversal position:  
The daily puzzle

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*You're a maker of the program and I try, you know, to have a bit of myself in that but as well, a bit of what's going on in society, what's cool, what's hip, like to have a balance in that and a bit of, you know, what your venue stands for.*

# PIECE 4

*The daily puzzle: dealing with a transversal position*

## “BOOKING AND...”: A CUMULATIVE POSITION

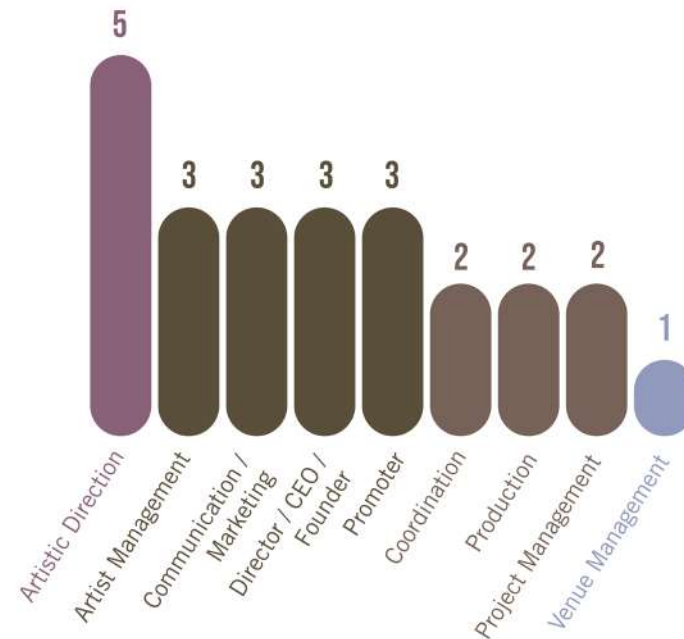
If interrogated European bookers display puzzling abilities from the relation they build with music, they are brought to sharpen said puzzling skills when entering the job market, developing transversal skills and knowledge through diverse field of studies and first work experiences. Subsequently, the realization that such combinative processes also appear constitutive not only of the professional path, but also of the job itself, is not so surprising. Indeed, this ability to mix and match set of skills, knowledge, fields and academic insights collected from potentially very various sources and contexts seem to overflow over the job itself.

**The very first hint of that observation relies within the job titles worn by the participating bookers: half of them occupy a position which title encompasses the word “AND”:** one is “Artistic Programmer and Production Manager”, the other “Venue Manager and Music Booker”, the later “Head of Program & Marketing”.

A further look at the responsibilities combined with booking duties sheds light upon the HR conception behind booking positions within European venues. 4 titles do not include a wording suggesting a booking duty, like a derivative from “booking”, “programming” or “curating”. They are “CEO”, “Director”, “Venue promoter” or “Promoter and Artist Manager”, and albeit they do are in charge of the booking within their venue, their job title does not suggest nor assess this responsibility. **Booking is then mostly correlated to a direction or coordination function within venues, but is also frequently paired with communication and marketing responsibilities or with artist, project or venue management.** Such roles are all heavily demanding and high-skilled, suggesting that the multi-faceted educational and professional background of most bookers is put in good use.

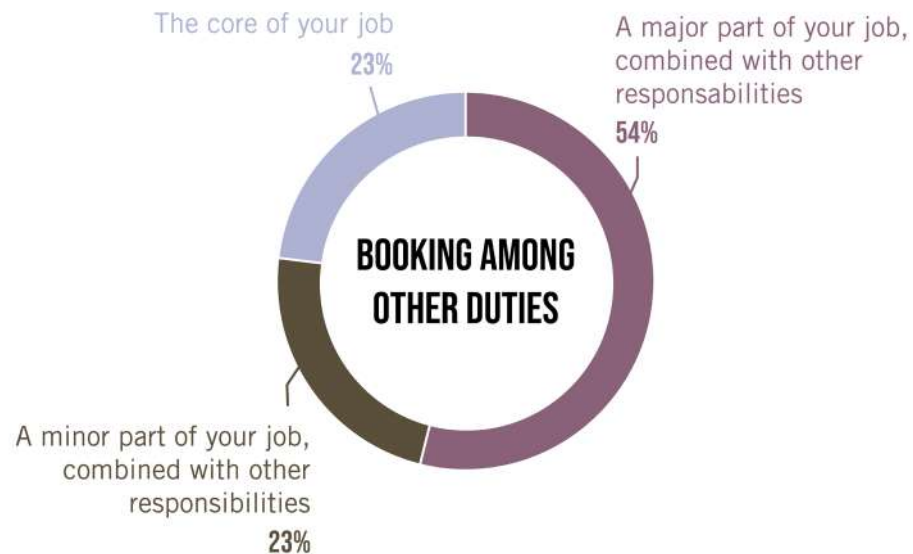


## JOB TITLES: BEYOND BOOKING



# PIECE 4

The daily puzzle: dealing with a transversal position



Indeed, the lexical field of choice and selection is omnipresent within the results of the study. The words used by the bookers to describe their daily tasks comprehend “screen and select acts”, “detection of new talents”, “looking for new talents”, “receive and sort artistic propositions”... but **this selective process is deeply connected to a notion of accuracy or pertinence**: “booking **relevant** artists”, “finding bands that would **draw enough audience**”, “booking **relevant** acts and activities”, “arrange a program consisting of **appealing** concerts for our city and its surroundings”... It is this notion of relevance that calls for a variety of skills to display in order to officiate as a booker, in what appears as a multifaceted position.

The fragmentation of the booking positions is further spotted on when 23% of the panel mention that booking only constitutes a minor part of their job. If the exact same share states the opposite, with booking being central to their activity, **the majority of the European bookers do combine booking duties (which are already diverse) with other responsibilities**. Indeed, the core of booking itself is defined by

“ A selection skill. The whole job is around choosing, selecting. I have a myriad of projects in front of me, and I need to pick among them according to our calendar, to the projects’ calendar, according to the audience expectations, according to the demographics, according to the local ecosystem... So a booker’s job, is a selecting job”.

Said selection is to be operated wisely:

“ You really have to develop a gut feeling. ‘Can this artist sell tickets?’ I wanted to say, ‘Can this artist fill a room?’, but that’s a lie. It has to fill a room, yes, but with selling tickets. »



# PIECE 4

*The daily puzzle: dealing with a transversal position*

## BOOKING AMONG ADMINISTRATIVE AND MANAGEMENT DUTIES

The bookers were asked to list their main tasks according to their job description, and the results indeed tend to prove that booking is a very transversal one, straddling over different departments, and explaining why a mixed career is generally perceived as an asset to a successful booking job. The **administrative duties do weight a lot within bookers' daily life**, who mention being in charge of budgetisation, contracts, negotiation, invoices, but also applications, collection and reporting on fundings or subsidies. Such missions are often undertaken with a **management responsibility** in mind, which includes general coordination of the venue, its schedule and its rota, strategic development, relationships with institutions, brands and societies, networking, and keeping in touch with local authorities. Then the **promotion activities** step in, implying audience and customer development, supervision of print and web promotional material, followed with production duties: phoning, mailing, meeting partners, checking riders, dealing with ticketing websites...

These duties then circumscribe around what is, at heart, the core of the booking job: prospecting, meeting with agents, observing the local scene, attending festivals and shows, estimating artists popularity... and still, listening to music. **At heart, but not always on paper, since among the 136 tasks that have been collected, only 24 are pertaining to this booking focus, with a total of 4 mentions of music listening.** These fewer mentions could either indicate an omnipresence of music-listening, to the point that it is not worth saying, but it could also illustrate an omnipresence of other duties that encroach upon the music essence. Hence, as this repertoire of activities demonstrate, being a booker means being:



*(...) the starting point for a lot of other jobs like production and promotion and ticketing and all those different parts. It always starts at my desk, because I book the shows, and then from my desk it goes to promotion, and then in a later stage, goes to production, and it goes to ticketing, and then the bar team is influenced by the acts I book.*

*So while you're not at an organizational level, you do have a lot of influence of what's actually going on in the venue of course. Which also results in me being part of a lot of meetings: because I'm part of the production meeting, and I'm part of the promotion meeting, and I'm part of... So it does end up being like a lot of, yeah, a lot of meetings."*



# PIECE 5

A difficult grasp:  
The HR puzzle

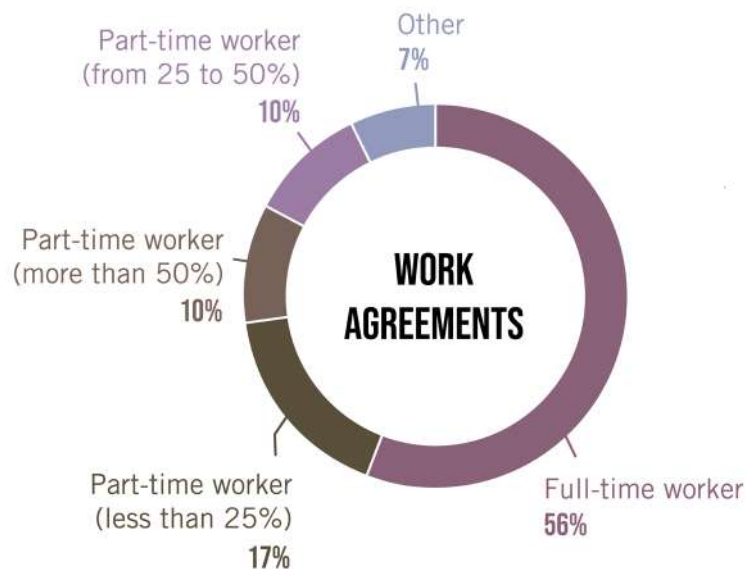
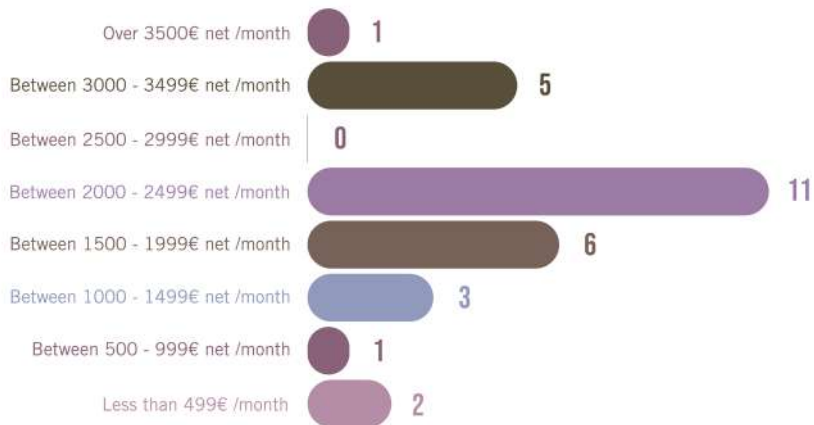
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*They do that because they love music, not really because they are going to be rich."*

# PIECE 5 *The HR puzzle: a difficult grasp*

## AVERAGE MONTHLY WAGE



Before entering the details of the work frames under which the bookers operate, it is important to recall that the results from this study emanate from 9 different European countries, with diverse approaches of the music industry but also of labour laws, working conditions, cost-of-living index, etc.

The venues represented in the investigated panel are also displaying a wide range in terms of size and teams, some being volunteer-based and others hiring up to 25 full time workers. The following pages are then to be understood as giving an overview of how the booking duties are framed within Europe, to be cautiously apprehended.

### DISCREPANCIES IN WAGES

From a Human Resource perspective, 77% of the bookers are tied to their venue through a permanent contract; 13% are freelance workers, and 10% are volunteers. The ones who do perceive a remuneration out of their booking activities were asked to provide an indication of their average monthly net-salary. The results tend to show that **the pay-gap between bookers can be pretty high**, while the majority of the panel earns €1500 and €2500 net per month.

If the highest wages can be attributed to national standards (they pertain to bookers working in the Nordic countries), the lower incomes can be correlated to a variety of factors. The first one is based on the volume of activity undertaken by the bookers, 37% of them being part-time workers, at least for the venue they represent within this study. They might complete this part-time position with another booking position in another venue or festival, given that a third of the panel do book for several places.

The smaller incomes may also depend of the status of the booker within its venue: they can work there within the frame of a full-time employment or as a freelance worker, but they can also own the venue, thus inscribing their HR functioning under a completely different perspective. This pattern is more usually witnessed regarding smaller venues in smaller towns, run with a highest share of volunteers, for which even the owners struggle to earn a living out of their activity. For them, the incomes over €2000 net appear as “really impressive”, for their economic reality is completely different, especially when observed at the lens of their numerous working hours. In addition, since many bookers occupy a double position of booking coupled with another responsibility, the nature of this alternate position could also explain the wage gaps, a leading position enticing a higher total wage than a production or communication role, for example.



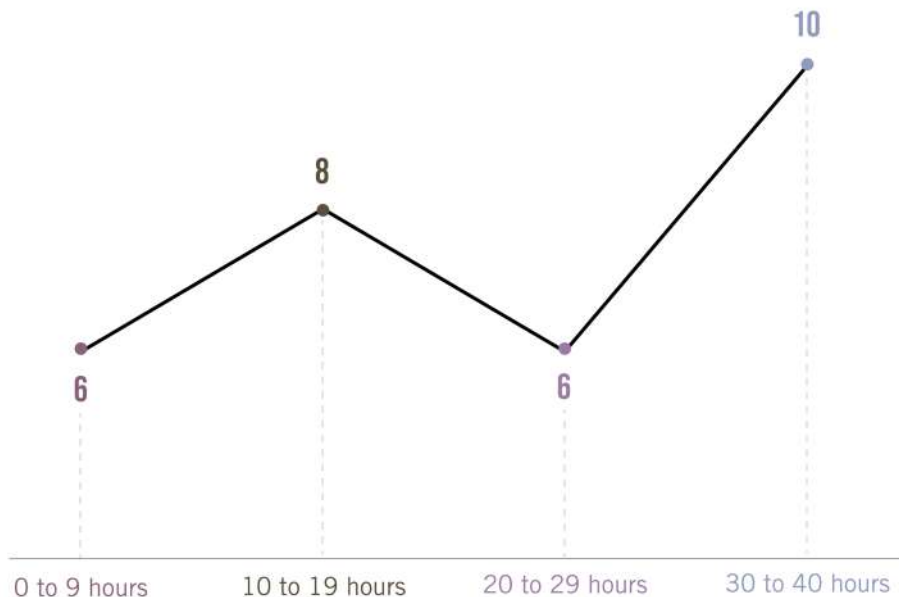
# PIECE 5 *The HR puzzle: a difficult grasp*

## DISCREPANCIES BETWEEN (UN)FORMAL WORKING HOURS

The qualitative interviews then unveil a particularly hot HR topic regarding the working hours dedicated to booking. If the question was meant to collect insights about the weekly time allocated to conduct tasks that were not fully pertaining to booking duties, it quickly moved towards what seems to be **a more systemic trouble for the bookers: just estimating their working hours**, whether they are allocated to booking or to something else.

The panel states a minimum of 3 weekly hours dedicated to their booking duties, and a maximum of 40 hours, which matches the repartition between full-time and part-time work agreements previously described. **But the interviews shed light on how difficult is the estimation process, for a consistent gap exists between the number of hours indicated on their work agreement, and the number of hours they consider actually doing.**

## ESTIMATION OF WEEKLY WORKING HOURS



*On my contract I would work 40 hours a week, but yeah, normally there's two, three, sometimes four evenings events per week for which you could partially count 2 hours as well, each."*

If this discrepancy between official and unofficial working hours may have its perks, allowing to design a good balance between calm and busier periods ("It's a good thing to have that flexibility, because it goes both ways"), it masks **two underground issues: the extra work put into booking without getting paid, and the consistent difficulty to assess whether an activity actually counts as work or as free time.** Indeed,



*There's a lot of extra work that isn't billable. You need to come out and hear a lot of music to understand the audience, and to know a lot of music, and what's going on in the music industry, and that's kind of off duty. I don't know if that's the case all over Europe but we have around 100 volunteers in our venue, so the staff at the concerts are volunteers, and for that reason I need to be there sometimes too. (...) I need to be there after hours pretty often, and I live almost an hour away driving from the venue, so it takes a lot of time."*

One of the interrogated bookers mentions that he has regular peak weeks where he goes way over the 40 hours he usually means to dedicate to his job, revolving around 50 to 55 hours a week. Said 55 hours are then "desk hours, "behind the computer" hours". But beyond the desk and the computer, he, and numerous others, share a difficulty to assess whether what they do is work-related, suggesting that an HR priority could be to regularly evaluate, along with the booker, whether the working agreement are well adjusted. But the issue goes well over the HR considerations:



*What about attending to concerts during week days? In a way, it is part of my job, it's partially work. To stay there late to discuss with the bands or artists about their projects is also work somehow. There is a lot of satellite work that can eat away your free time: maybe not up to 15 hours per week, but even if it does request an actual workload from you, it does require your availability." (See from p.46)*

# PIECE 6

## Venue-based agenda: Shaping the Puzzle frame

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*I love my job (...) it's what it is, there are upsides and downsides and downsides are always about money."*

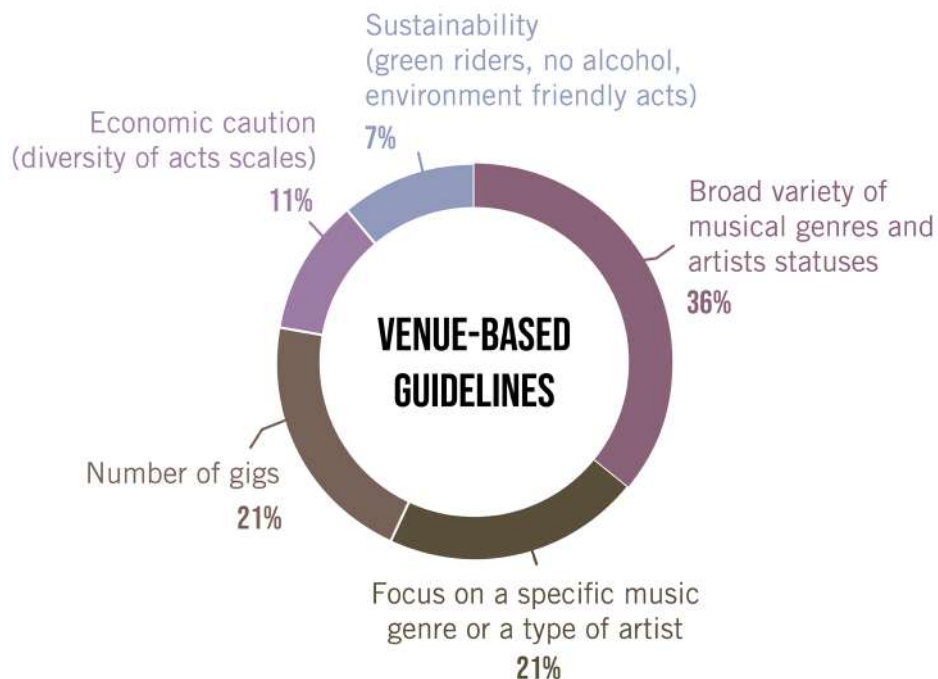
# PIECE 6

## Shaping the puzzle frame: venue-based agenda

A puzzle implies a combination of pieces that, once terminated, gives a coherent global picture to look at. Upon starting a puzzle, one needs to know what the final image shall look like. It is no different with the music puzzle that bookers put together: they usually know what the overall picture shall look like once they have selected and combined all of their musical acts.

The following pages are then aiming to tackle the potential frames or overall unity that the bookers are meant to represent through the pieces they combine. The participating bookers were thus asked whether their venues were implementing a particular artistic agenda or following given guidelines.

Among the panel, 6 bookers said that they had no formal agenda or guidelines to work with, hence suggesting that they are in a position of total control over their booking practices. The rest of the panel, on the opposite, asserts that they are acting within a frame, which constitutive guidelines can be scattered as follows:



The guidelines they described were categorized into 5 main types of objectives towards the realization of which the bookers have to work. If some bookers shall pay attention to only one type of constraints, others' programme has to reflect the combination of up to 3 of the following categories.

### BEING DIVERSE WHILE BEING FOCUSED: NAVIGATING MUSICAL GENRES AND ARTISTS STATUSES

The most recurrent one is the requirement for the bookers to arrange a programme that displays a wide range of musical genres and/or artist statuses, meaning that they are expected to book international headliners but also more local, emergent or amateur artists ([see piece 12 p.54](#)).

The second pattern, seemingly opposite, tackles the request for a particular focus on either a musical genre or an artist status (booking mainly rap music, booking mainly emergent artists, etc.)

Although it might seem that these two categories concern very different venues with different guidelines, the two are regularly combined in the agenda that the venues draft regarding their programmes: **they are numerous to request both a diversity and a focus, creating a color of programmation**". Said color often dates back to the historic musical anchorage of the venue:



*We have always been a venue that's more focused on, like, alternative guitar music. So in the past, there was always a lot of metal shows and punk shows, hardcore shows as well, and that's still an interesting scene, but if you only focus on that scene, it's very hard to diversify our program.*

*So we tried to move away from that stuff a little bit, but then you notice that our core audience, that has been coming to the venue for the last 20 years that they get disappointed in the program that we put up. So it's kind of always, like, trying to find a balance between doing enough stuff to keep your core audience and also trying to diversify."*

# PIECE 6

## Shaping the puzzle frame: venue-based agenda

### BEING AT THE FOREFRONT WHILE BEING AHEAD OF TIME: NAVIGATING SCHEDULES

**The number of gigs to be organized throughout the year is another solid guideline to work through. Indeed, the total number of gigs that are hosted during a year is not always representative of the number of gigs that are booked by the venue.**

Indeed, several of the venues represented in the study rent their premises every now and then to local promoters or associations which do not possess their own building.

The venue rental share can vary deeply from one venue to another, depending to a variety of factors: legal status, income sources, amount of collaborations going on with local partners... One of the interviewed bookers provides the following details over a programme of 12 months:

- 50% of the shows hosted are organized/produced by his venue;
- 46% of the shows are co-produced by his venue and an external partner;
- 4% of the shows are rentals to an external partner.

Consequently, **his degree of involvement and influence as a booker varies** accordingly to the nature of the gig. The 50% of gigs that are organized by its own venue are his sole responsibility to book. The 46% of shows that are co-produced with another organization usually implies a more collaborative process, which can take the form of a booking committee gathering a few stakeholders revolving around the event itself, into which the venue booker actively engages within.

The booker's responsibility is more delicate to apprehend regarding the remaining 4% of the hosted gigs. He confides that he does keep an eye on the acts that shall perform in the venue, in case one the artist would be either suspected or convicted for violence (especially sexist or sexual violence), even though the venue is legally not allowed to refuse to rent out its place to a producer or promoter for that reason.

He recently vetoed two shows, and confesses that harsh negotiations followed the venue's refusal:



*We refused and it did not go well. Honestly, there have been some rough replies to my emails, from agents or producers who just don't get it. They don't get why we judge their artists, even though they have not faced court yet. You see, that kind of discourse. So what we do is that we invoke that the building we rent out comes with a team, and that within that team, there are people, men and women, who would mobilize their right to withdraw labour shall a suspected or convicted artist perform.*

*They would use this right, they would not show up on gig day, and hence the gig would not be able to process without them. We do not phrase it as a threat, but we warn them: ok, you may come over, but there's a chance for you to arrive to an empty venue because everyone would have withdrawn. And the team would have all the rights to do so: we do not want to welcome rapists.*

*There are women within our team: they can argue that they don't want to be near, or to promote, rapists. But beyond that: we have also refused to host musicians who said inappropriate stuff, like homophobic remarks or so. The guy had already been convicted for that matter, so...*

*Anyway: for venue rentals, we do not interfere with the musical or artistic side of booking at all. We are not allowed to veto an act because we feel it's shitty music. But we do intervene for our team to feel safe around the acts."*



# PIECE 6

## Shaping the puzzle frame: venue-based agenda

Beyond the varying degree of responsibility and influence that are inherent to the possibly diverse organizational frames behind a gig relies heavy **calendar constraints**. Indeed, there is a **venue-schedule to work with**. In the previous examples, the 4% of rentals are among the first to be pinned on the calendar, usually with a two-year notice:



*Right now<sup>7</sup>, I'm working on rentals for November 2025<sup>8</sup>. I already have a gig booked, and it's rather mainstream, as it's often the case with rentals. So it already sets the tone for that booking semester: I have this mainstream act, and it's rap music. There's another rap gig on the go for the same period, which also targets a broad audience. So my goal for that semester, is to build something around these 2 concerts: something that will end up being altogether diverse and consistent. To inject a rhythm, in other words."*

7. At the time of the interview, on November 2023

8. This quote sheds light upon another difficulty of the booking position: how to remain at the cutting edge of the music topicality when a decisive part of the program is fully booked 2 years ahead?

To this primary calendar constraint adds up multiple equivalent guidelines to think of, starting with the **venue team-schedule that comes with its own rules** to obey. It **encompasses general yearly guidelines**, such as worked weekends to be organized on a rota basis, days off, national holidays, summer breaks, vacations...

On top of the yearly patterns comes the **monthly guidelines** (for example events that last 2 to 3 days, like an in-house festival, that will eat up a lot of the monthly working hours, inducing a calmer period to ensue), and again the **weekly guidelines** (observing labour code rules, such as a rest period in-between work shifts or lunch breaks, allocating enough time for set-up and get-out, managing the different halls where necessary so the acts won't trouble one another...).

### STANDING OUT WHILE BEING BUILT-IN: NAVIGATING TERRITORY

Then **comes the artists' schedules** as another booking entry to compose with: keeping alert on bands' EP or album releases, keeping up with upcoming tours, trying to secure international and national headliners... While conducting this active watch, bookers also **take into consideration the territory-schedule**, keeping track of **what will be organized in the same geographical area** to avoid competition between events: knowing which festivals will be organized and when in the same location, remaining informed of the community-based events put up together by small associations...

The two latter constraints, regarding both the artists and the territory, do come with an **extra struggle to cope with for some venues with a geographic particularity**. Several bookers from the panel mention that the very localization of their venue constitutes a restrictive pattern to consider. The venues that are not located in the big cities, or the ones that are located near a big city, do suffer from a heavy competition when they aim to negotiate big acts to come perform in their venues. When touring agencies or agents come up with a tour routing, they aim to optimize it so they can save time, money, or effort (i.e. performing near an air or ground transportation hub, performing next to a border to hit the next country quickly, benefiting from the social representation embedded within a popular city...) As a result, many of the venues are feeling left behind when it comes to secure international or national headliners:



*We do notice that we're really dependent on what agents offer us, (...) because we're in, I would say, the second biggest city in the country for live music. So when most international acts are touring, they want to play in the capital city. So if they don't find space in the capital city, they end up with us, so that's, kind of a waterfall system here. We notice that the bigger acts, that we would like to have play our venue... Well, it only works out if they don't get a chance to play in another bigger city".*



# PIECE 6

## Shaping the puzzle frame: venue-based agenda

For the venues located way out of cities or of travelling routes, the struggle to have acts agreeing to come play their revue weights enormously on their booking strategies:

“ *We are away from everything. And people, just flat out refuse to come here. The biggest of my constraints, as far as booking is concerned, has never been about the money or the artistic side.*

*For me, the trouble is always geography-related. I can't even count the times when an agent, even at the national scale, has put up a tour, and your venue is part of it and it's great, and then, a week later, the agent calls back saying 'I'm sorry, the European agent has decided not to keep your venue in the routing. He doesn't know the city, he never heard of it. But he knows that bigger city 3 hours away, or he knows that city which is close to the frontier with that other country so it will be more convenient...*

*You see? So they just cancel on me, and I have to start all over again with another act.”*

Beyond the location, the financial capacity of the venue is also at stakes when it comes to secure a bigger act:

“ *Once in a while, it would be nice to get a bidding round of one of the headliners. So the process is, when you find out that you want one artist, then you send in the bid, and then you have to wait, and wait, and wait, and see if there's another one who wants to pay more, and then be more interesting for the artists.*

*But in the meantime you have to put everything other on hold, because this one artist depends very much on how you want to build the rest of the program. So sometimes that could be very frustrating.”*

### BEING CAUTIOUS WHILE BEING AUDACIOUS: NAVIGATING BUDGETS AND SUSTAINABILITY

Consequently, the fourth most recurrent guideline is the **economic caution** that the bookers have to play by when operating their choices, and said caution means that the overall yearly programme has to be economically sustainable for the venue. Thereby, several bookers explain that once they have pinned all of the calendar-related constraints upon their booking schedule, they start with selecting their headliners. The booker who declined its venue programme on the basis of a 50% / 46% / 4% ratios works in a venue hosting 80 gigs per year. Out of them, he is fully responsible for booking 50% of them, so his booking strategy revolves around 40 concerts. Out of these 40 concerts, he indicates that 10 gigs are dedicated to headliners, to be sure to reach a certain level of income based on tickets sales. Once these 10 gigs are secured, he has the possibility to explore more emergent, experimental or niche musical acts, referring to the puzzle image once more:

“ *That puzzle is not made of only one entry. There is this economic aspect obviously, that ratio that I have to find between bigger and smaller acts. And to find that balance, once I have my puzzle pieces in front of me, I immediately settle the biggest ones in priority. I look at the rest afterwards: the up-and-coming artists, the music genres... And only then I sort between my hip-hop pieces, my electro pieces, my reggae pieces, the rock ones, the world music ones... So in the end, they all participate to this global puzzle.”*



# PIECE 6

*Shaping the puzzle frame: venue-based agenda*

The last most common guideline to constitute a venue agenda relies in a call for **sustainability**: bookers are expected to select, or to negotiate, for the acts they book to follow environmental and/or social guidelines. The examples mentioned throughout the data collection process encompass attention paid to acts initiating or willing to implement sustainable patterns: favorizing ground and/or public transportation, forbidding alcohol in the dressing rooms, vegetarian or vegan catering, etc.) One of the most experienced booker from the panel does attest of the circumvolutions he witnesses with time passing by:

“It’s about the younger generations. They are not keen on touring on a tourbus for example. They perceive it as old-school, as a symbol for aging cocky rock stars. They prefer riding the train, or maybe a minivan. They self-discipline themselves so much more.

*Sometimes I look back at the riders that I used to receive 15 years ago, and they make absolutely no sense. So OK, there is still a bit of overkill stuff that the artists sometimes ask for, but now we refuse. We explain that in our venue, we just don’t purchase that kind of shitty products. Sometimes we provide twice less alcohol than they request: a band of 3 people, asking for 3 bottles of hard spirits and a couple of pack beers... And I’m like, guys, you know this is your workspace, right? And we cut on the alcohol.”*

## WORKING AS A LONE WOLF... AMONG A HERD

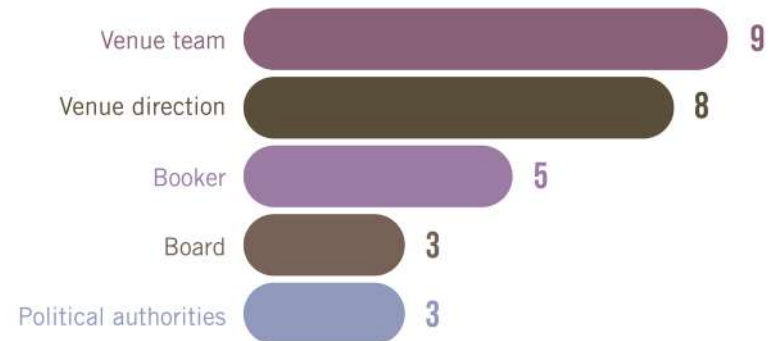
The guidelines previously described are generally erected based on a collective work: it is mostly the venue team that works together upon these general criteria to be taken into consideration by the whole team, not only the bookers. The venue direction comes as second most recurrent decision-maker as far as the venue general agenda is concerned, mostly associated with the booker oneself: “it’s myself and the CEO, but we reflect with marketing and production to hear their opinion”. As for the board of directors, the political authorities have been mentioned by 3 bookers has having a word to say about the general guidelines, usually justified by the public funding that they get: they are then due “to report to the authorities”.

Two bookers mentioned that they were the sole person in charge of the guidelines definition, matching the cases in which the booker is also the owner of the venue.

**These guidelines here described allow to bring more perspective to the bookers’ role: it distances the image of a solo rider who imposes its own vision over both the venues and their audiences and allows to depicts them as heavily dependent on a multitude of factors that are beyond their reach or sphere of influence.**

Although the guidelines do not deprive them of their curating role, it does highlight the fact that they curate within the borders of a frame, and that this frame is usually tackled collectively.

## GUIDELINES DEFINITION



# PIECE 7

Social and sectorial agenda:  
Defining the puzzle colors

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*I have to deal with an environment that is completely obsessed with bigger, better, more successful.”*



# PIECE 7

## Defining the puzzle colors: social and sectorial agenda

If the previous piece depicts venue-based guidelines shaping the bookers activities, the micro and meso-sociological scales that they described are to be understood as part of a bigger picture, pertaining to rather meta-guidelines that also play a part in orienting the bookers' choices. The topic was tackled through the qualitative part of the research process, and has not been extensively discussed by the participants as a core or invasive component of their daily work processes. Still, four meta hot topics arose from the interviews.

### DEALING WITH INTERNATIONAL PRESSURES: BOOKING AGENCIES

The first concern relies on the **pressure that international booking agencies do apply** on small or mid-scale venues. The matter was brought up during the conversation about the downsides or difficulties that the bookers would encounter in their job. First, for the way they distort the usual, more traditional artistic development journey that musicians have to undergo before reaching a certain level of fame or structuration:

*(...) the very strong grip that international booking agencies have on the local market, and the way that we notice that even smaller bands are getting picked up very quickly by international promoters, or by local branches of international agencies. And you do notice that in our country, the market is becoming very divided: so we got Live Nation on one side, and then you have, like, two or three other main players, and you notice that there's a lot of competition between them and we do get, like, offered acts a lot, by one agent, from one agency, and then someone from another agency shows up, and then from another agency... And you feel that they're fighting in between them. They're fighting for the approval of the international agents that are above, like, level above them.*

*And so it's interesting because there's like a professionalization in the scene. But I do think that sometimes it goes too fast, and for national bands as well, like young national bands, they get picked up out by a booking agent really quickly, but sometimes you just have to give them the chance to grow, to find their own shows, and try to find their own scene, and stuff. And that doesn't happen as much anymore."*

This impact over the bands themselves is likely to interfere on the booking work afterwards, for it might overshadow the independent scene with time passing by. In addition, these international agencies also contribute to the general increase of costs in the sector and to the uniformization of the musical scenes, as another booker underlines:



*Maybe the most difficult part of the job is the more technical booking process. (...) We are kind of in the same market, and the prices for the artists, for the headliners has increased a lot (...) It's kind of shifting to the bigger is getting bigger, and the smaller is suffering of that because of the bidding process. So it's the hardest struggle for the ones who do not own their artists, or do the managing AND the booking. Because in our country, there's like 3 big companies, that also do the managing, and that also do book the tours of the artist, and they have their own festivals. So that means that it's harder to get some of the artists that you would like to present, because in the contracts, you have this exclusivity clause. So that's something that we have been working against (...) also because the big festivals are getting more alike, you have the same all summer."*



## DEALING WITH NATIONAL PRESSURE: COSTS, FUNDINGS AND ARTISTIC MOBILITY

**This international-based struggle is doubled down by national troubles or regulations**, some of which also partakes to the economical side of things. The examples collected during the research include the rise in technical costs, freelance costs, energy costs and payroll costs (see [Live DMA's report](#)), that do seem to greatly impact the European music venues. Even the ones who perceive subsidies (see [piece 12](#)) are not spared, and are led to alter their booking strategies in order to keep up with the costs, to the detriment of the artists and especially the aspiring ones, who represent a greater financial risk:

“ We’re subsidized by the government, but our subsidies don’t get indexed. So we’re, really, in a big gap now between our recent costs and what we get from the government and also the income that we have from ticket sales and stuff, because we plan our ticket prices and our costings a year, or a year and a half in advance. So it’s very hard to keep up with rising costs and inflation there. And the result of this financial hardship is that we had to cut out on some interesting projects.”

Moreover, the bookers also confides that their national rules do not always align well with the ones of the neighbouring countries, and might bring extra trouble when trying to book at the international level:

“ I think that one downside is the different regulations from the different countries. In mine, for example, we have the VAT really high compared to the neighbouring countries, where for example the VAT for tickets is 0 %. Us, we have 20%. So it’s quite hard to organize, because it creates a competition. It’s hard (...) these regulations make our work harder and harder.”



## DEALING WITH SECTORIAL PRESSURE: ON-STAGE AND OFF-STAGE PRIORITIES

Another guideline, that could be venue-based but that seems to pertain more of a **systemic approach is the focus on gender representation on stage** (see [piece 12](#)). The topic emerged spontaneously in almost all of the interviews: either when the bookers were invited to depict their own values or belief-system that they would like to align with the way the book, or because their venue or their country would be implemented a specific protocol. Hence, this attention can result from either a personal initiative, a personal constraint to work by:

“ Since a few years, I started being more aware of the balance between the amount of female artists and male artists on programs. And I’m still figuring out how to practically implement this in my way of working, but I do collect data on that, like it’s super simple. I check our calendar and I count the acts and then there’s a percentage and I compare that to the other venues in my country. And I can say that we are doing better than most other venues.”

That personal constraint being widely shared among the panel, it does belong more to the meta shifts surrounding booking practices than micro-level ones. A last macro-level pattern that has been frequently referred to during the research process deals with the audience habits (See the [5th Issue of the Cultural Tracker](#)), that seem to have switched since the pandemic occurred: people seem to tend to wait on before purchasing their tickets, and to opt for larger events rather than community-based ones:

“ I get the feeling that in my country, people still buy tickets but for, like, bigger shows and bigger names, but our reach is more to aim for the younger artists, and more focus on discovery. And that makes it hard to convince people to come to exciting new artists that we are really enthusiast about.”

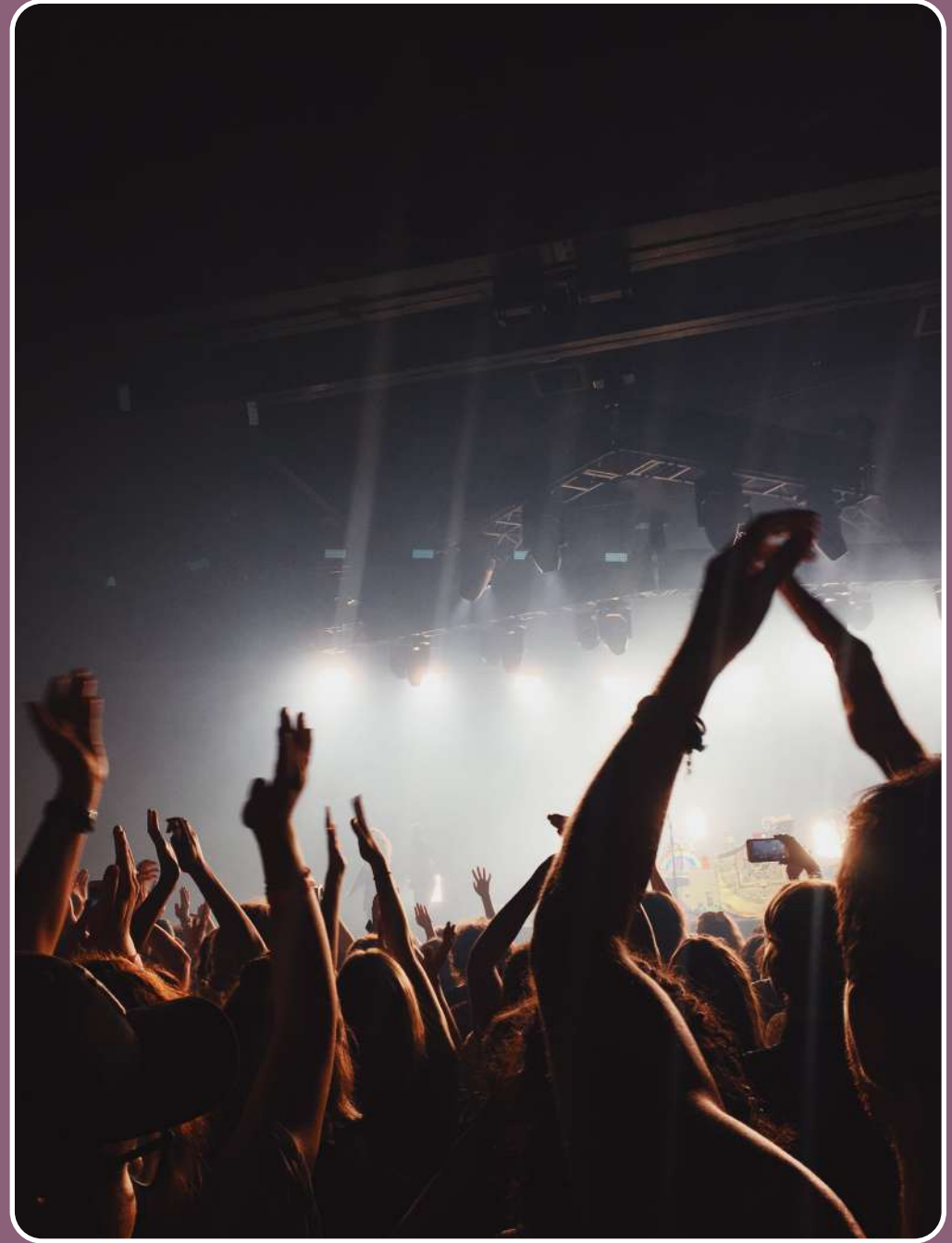
## PIECE 7 *Defining the puzzle colors: social and sectorial agenda*

The previous pages highlight the image hidden in the scattered puzzle pieces. These micro, meso and macro social levels of guidelines are intertwined to create both a frame within which to operate, but they also give a shape and a color to the pieces, allowing the bookers to start matching them. **Their core skill then resides in their ability to create a coherent and sustainable overall image, where you altogether “program artistically” and “book economical”, among all the other depicted constraints to play by.**

Once again, these guidelines tend to give more perspective upon the role of the booker within the venue, but also within their country and within their transnational music sector, each level carrying its share of constraints. This combination of guidelines also indirectly cast light upon the skills and capacity that the booking position requires: a deep knowledge of its territory, from the local to the international scale; a sharp attention to social concerns; serious organisation skills and a clear ability to negotiate.



Cigarra at Musicbox in Lisbon, Portugal © Filipa Aurélio



© Laura Stanley

# PIECE 8

Finding the right pieces:  
Within the puzzle

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*I think it's a good thing that you have several people on the booking, also because I have been in, six years as a Booker. And sometimes, I suppose some of the booking has to reflect my tastes and my idea of what is good music, so I think it can only be a good idea that you are more people to share the role of a booker, because everyone has a different taste in music.*

# PIECE 8 *Within the puzzle: finding the right pieces*

Now that the overall picture that the puzzle represents is defined, that the frame is built and that the pieces are sorted by shapes and colors, the study can proceed to the next step of the music puzzle game: finding the right piece to position at the right slot. In order to do so, we asked the bookers whether they were working collectively when it came to the selection process, beyond the general agenda of the venue that is generally worked upon as a team.

**The answers portray the booking process as a rather solitary experience**, with 20% of the panel indicating to be working “totally on its own”, and 57% working “mostly on their own”, but acknowledging “occasional participation from other people”. Going further into the investigation, it appears that some bookers do even complain for a **feeling of isolation that can get doubled down by a feeling of pressure**:



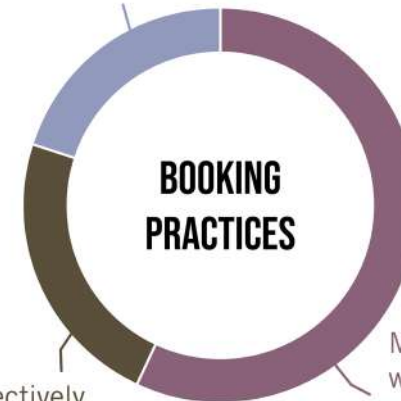
*As a venue booker, you're the top of... Yeah, not the top of the hierarchy, but everybody's looking at you for which artists you're bringing in. Which is funny because sometimes, you don't even have control of which artists are coming. (...) But it feels a bit like, you know, you get blamed that the artist is not playing in your venue, but there is nothing you can do. (...) I know an agent that I worked with. He often asked for two or three offers from different venues, and then the European agents can choose which venue they want to play. So in the end they can choose between three same offers, and then it's just the location.”*

Going further with the investigation, the first point was to identify the collaborative booking patterns that the remaining 23% of the panel evocate, combined with the “occasional” support sometimes provided. The topic was first tackled quantitatively, aiming to isolate the nature of the support received by some bookers.

**The main source of support hence comes in the shape of advice on booking choices (i.e. helping the bookers to decide between similar acts), acts suggestions and administrative support.** In the margins, bookers may seek validation for their program once they have already operated the selection process, or collect details such as contacts, information on fees or hospitality riders from other people.

Totally on your own

20%



Mostly collectively

23%

Mostly on your own, with occasional participation from other people

57%

## NATURE OF THE INPUT PROVIDED BY EXTERNAL PEOPLE



# PIECE 8 *Within the puzzle: finding the right pieces*

## THE (UN)OFFICIAL MEMBERS OF THE HERD: COLLEAGUES AND AUDIENCE MEMBERS

Said help also comes from a variety of sources.

The bookers who tend to work collectively are mostly surrounded by their colleagues from their own venues, while support from fellow bookers working for distinct venues still provide 20% of the external help that bookers receive. Collaborative booking patterns can also engage with audience members, a dedicated programming board or committee (in place within 5 participating venues), elected representatives or educational institutions. Both quantitative and qualitative focuses allowed for the bookers to add other insights upon either the nature of the help or its providers, but none were reported then.

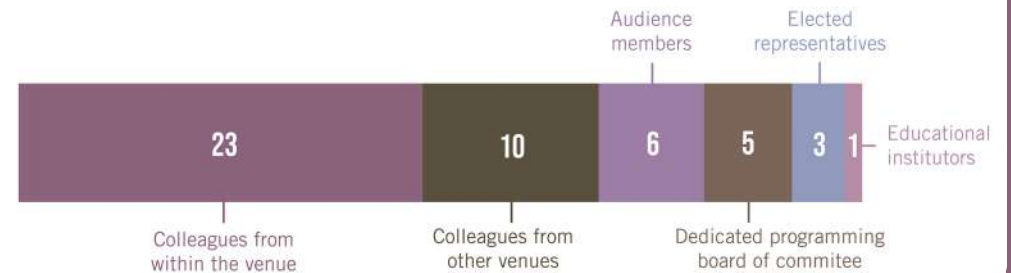
However, the qualitative interviews allowed to gather further details about how the collaborative patterns function. **It appeared that on top of the official programming board or committees in place, numerous bookers also collect advice or inspiration from more informal contexts.** By way of an example, one booker explains:

*I have a Facebook group with the metal people, the metal fans. It's primarily volunteers, volunteer workers from the venue. So I write them "I have these names, I'm starting up the booking for the next season, do you have any suggestions?" And I should look out for it. So that's how I do. And then with the jazz guys, I have kind of a meeting about every other month or so just to discuss the jazz program.*

*We are trying to do a little bit of the same for folk music, we have kind of this community of folk interested audience who comes, who suggests things. But it's a bit more randomly than the jazz and the metal, so it kind of depends on the genre."*



## CATEGORIES OF EXTERNAL PEOPLE SOLICITED



The same pattern may be set up with audience members, through official consultation "we send out a survey asking for 'which genre do you like? Do you have any tips? What's your age? Where are you from? Why do you visit our venue?'" but also through more informal contexts:

*I do know people who fit the archetype of the fan of artist X or Y. And yeah, of course it happens that I ask, 'what do you think of this? And this artist, would you buy a ticket? Or do you find them interesting or not? And that's also visitors'.*

*Sometimes it's not black and white, it's grey! Like the visitors sometimes are also friends, or social contacts, and obviously you discuss music with each other, so there is a lot of exchange of information there."*

Audience members do use several contact mode to have their voices heard by the bookers: some come and have a chat with the booker on gig night, some send an email requiring for a band to perform the venue, but some are also sprinkling clues without always realizing it: several bookers explain that they go and check the comments on the social networks, whether they concern the venue itself, an act they consider booking, but also the personal interactions in between audience members who would share recommendations and memories on the comment section of a post announcing a concert, for example.

# PIECE 8 *Within the puzzle: finding the right pieces*

## THE (UN)OFFICIAL MEMBERS OF THE HERD: PEERS, FIGURES AND INTERMEDIARIES

The same goes with the professional networks or resources used by the bookers. **In addition of the formalized podcasts; newsletters or rosters that booker may resort to, some informal cooperation emerges at smaller scales.**

Informal bookers alliances are created on the margins, gathering venues from the same geographical scope or that are turned towards the same kind of musical genres, to collect general updates from the sector, to break the feeling of isolation, but also to pool their resources or weight on a tour routing, especially for the smaller venues which team up in order to assure that the tour might reach the remote area they are located into. Even when automated data is concerned, there is room for informal spaces to develop. Indeed, 27 out of 30 bookers do use Youtube and Spotify, either to visualize an act to assess of its pertinence within the music puzzle or to compose a venue-dedicated playlist to be listened to in order to operate artistic choices.

Soundcloud is also a tool frequently mobilized by 60% of the panel, but other platforms such as Deezer, Quobuz, Apple Music, Amazon Music Unlimited, Tidal or Napster find few to no echo among the interrogated panel, referring to Facebook, Instagram, Bandcamp, Resident Advisor or Viberate instead. They use them equally to “discover new artists”, “follow up on artists previously booked”, and to “analyze the streams / data”. When they use the platforms at all (one booker said that he uses none of them “That stupid Facebook!”), they do it with caution, trying to make sure that bands which are big on the platforms (i.e. TikTok or Instagram) can actually transform their online popularity into charged tickets.

“We do check numbers of course, because the numbers are what the booking agents are always pushing for. So they're like “this artist has well streamed”, and then we do check streams, and also socials followers, and you try to find out how many people you know are following these artists already. (...) We check previous ticket sales a lot. Like it's one of the first questions we always ask if we get a, if we get an act offered.”

Among the direct solicitations that the bookers receive, the same divide of formal / informal sources of inspiration emerges. Many requests emanate from agents or (young) artists:

“Usually when an artist emails me directly, in 99 % of the cases this means that they don't have a big enough team yet, they don't sell enough tickets yet. So usually the answer is “thanks for your email, but I don't see possibilities. Good luck with your tour,”

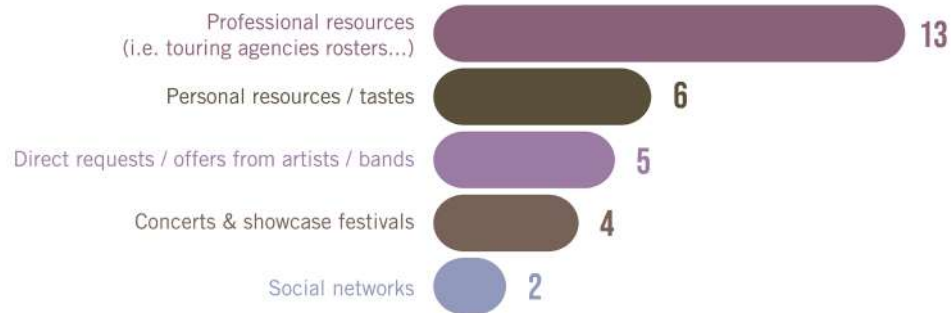
they may represent up the vast majority of the booking inspiration: “in my position, I get a lot of offers. So I think, it's maybe 80, 90 % that I get offered, then 20 % that I'm assertive, trying to get the band myself.” But beyond the audience members, the artists or their teams, inspiration is also to be found in the bookers' personal environment, which one booker has qualified of “the influence of nowadays”. It may combine personal tastes and preferences, but also the ones of friends or relatives:

“I talk a lot with, I dunno... My neighbour, for example. Or my family. There are an infinity of sources actually: associations, friends advising to listen to some stuff...”

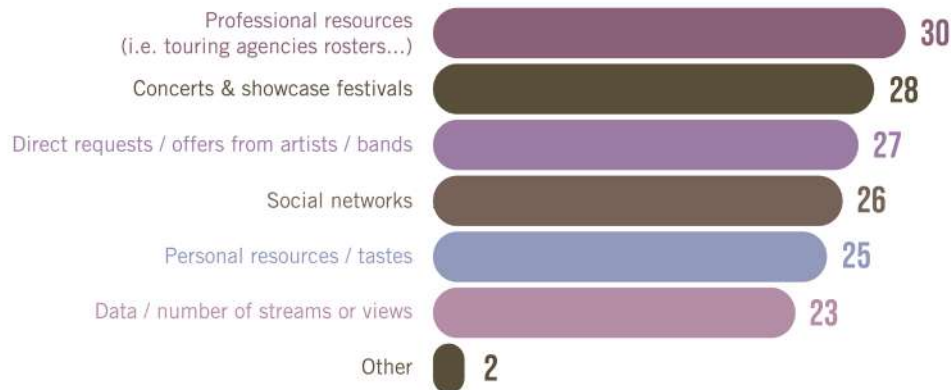


# PIECE 8 *Within the puzzle: finding the right pieces*

## PRINCIPAL SOURCES OF INSPIRATION



## OCCURENCES OF THE INSPIRATION SOURCES



To wrap it up, bookers were asked to hierarchies previously described sources of inspiration. In addition to the ones already displayed arises the attendance to concert and showcase festivals: 28 out of the 30 participating bookers mentioned having attended such events over the past 5 years<sup>910</sup>. But beyond these professional events, every participating booker indicates attending concerts or festivals as part of their job, on top of the ones that their venue booked, usually on a monthly basis (23/30) or a semester basis (5/30). But again, this concert-goer predisposition (that originates many bookers' taste for music, as explain in the second piece of study) mirrors informal attendance, when bookers attend concerts or festival outside of their job<sup>11</sup>.

When observed without any hierarchization pattern, the formerly described inspiration sources do reflect a combination of most of the sources.

Once again, the booker's job is all about a mix-and-match protocol pattern: they combine inspirations collected from various contexts the same way they combine the levels of guidelines: venue-based, sector based and social based. However, the puzzle they are expected to compose is not made of a given number of pieces to assemble: they have to choose, among thousands of potential music pieces, the ones which shape and color will perfectly align with the frame and depict a coherent image.

9. The temporal frame was voluntarily large to take the pandemic into consideration.  
10. The full list of showcases festivals that the panel mentioned is available in piece 12.  
11. One booker said that he does not attend to many concerts or festivals, either personally or professionally, apart maybe once a year.





# PIECE 9

Evaluating its matching skills:  
Contemplating the puzzle

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*I think you have to work from your heart, so you have to believe in what you're doing. And if you don't believe in what you are programming, I think you're creating a distance between the programming and the audience."*

### THE REWARDS OF BOOKING: SPREADING ENJOYMENT AND INCLUSION

Now that the music puzzle is complete, with all the pieces matched together and the overall image for the audience to gaze at, comes the time for the bookers to reflect upon the ups and downs of the selection process they just terminated. **Exploring the joys, worries and sorrows of the bookers imply to take a step away from official frames and to dig further into their more personal spheres. Indeed, what they identify as upsides or rewards of their activity always bear the mark of their own tastes, values or emotions.** The most recurring ones has to do with the **audience members satisfaction**: seeing them having fun, dancing the night away to the music they have booked, enjoying the gig sounds like the upmost rewards:

*"I think that what makes me happy would be the satisfied customers. It's always about them, mostly and especially if you organize those events for yourself, for the emotional side, not for the money side. There is, of course, there is stuff that you have to book that you don't want to do... But on the other hand, you have those things that really matter, and that are really fun. They always bring the joy to your life, I think".*

Even if a show playing to a full house means a greater chance of financial stability, and underlines the booker's sharp selection of a music piece well suited for the venue's audience, a half-full room is also perceived as a success if the audience feedback is positive: it may trigger future visits to the venue or even create customer loyalty. **Another key upside resides within a diversified audience**, when a concert successfully targets an audience section that usually does not frequent the venue that much. Some bookers hence take pride in "founding rock concerts for families" for examples, while others find their core interest in **collaborative or social-oriented projects**:

*"Yeah, we had this new way of working with the young people. A lot of venues struggle with getting the young audience and we have, we made this collaboration with the local high school to get a little group of students to kind of book help me book, some names and have these monthly concerts, so they are booking and they are marketing the concerts and kind of being the ambassadors."*

Another frequent source of joy comes from the colleagues that bookers work with, whom they may have a lot in common with, and which is thus described as very comforting:

*"And the upside of working in the music biz', obviously it's that you made a living from something that you are super passionate about and you have something in common with everyone you work with. Because everyone who works in the music industry is passionate about music, so you meet a lot of like-minded people, which is very interesting.*

*Yeah, it's kind of a humble job. It's very noble, like an artist makes something potentially very valuable to people, and you get to be a tiny part between the art and, well, the audience. You bring the art to the audience, so to say. And there for me, there's a lot of value in that, a lot of satisfaction."*

Without being colleagues per se, the panel also **takes pleasure from working with artists**. This joy gets enhanced in two occasions: either when the booker is able to book an act that he/she personally enjoys "I give cool artists that I support a stage", but also, if not mostly, when the said artists greatly evolve within the music scene afterwards, hitting bigger venues and securing their career paths, a career in which bookers have "played a tiny part". It also work the other way round, when bookers have welcomed an act they were not particularly enthusiastic about, but that they learnt to like:

*"to develop your personal taste and, you what you like, you need to listen to broad spectre of genres and music. So I find this very interesting."*



# PIECE 9

Contemplating the puzzle: evaluating its matching skills

## THE STRUGGLES OF BOOKING: TIME, MONEY AND PAPERWORK INFRINGING UPON MUSIC

On the other end, the main difficulties that have been brought up throughout the research process often echo an imbalance between personal aspirations and the realities of the music sector.

If some bookers celebrate the freedom granted to them in their booking strategies (“What I like the most about the job is maybe the freedom. It’s an open puzzle.”), most of the time, the harshness of the position relies within a growing disconnection between their daily booking duties and the reasons why they have picked that position: their taste for music. By way of an example, bookers mention the multiplying sources and inspiration they collect or are exposed to, some of them they are deeply enthusiast about, only to leave them aside due to **heavier selection processes**:

*“We can’t host shows on a daily basis, so we can’t welcome everyone, even the bands that rehearse within our premises. And that creates a lot of frustration, not being able to content everyone.”*

It can also be due to the **predominance of economic factors** “the downsides are always about the money” or of too heavy negotiation duties:

*“It gets so boring during the negotiation phase. You just hit the figures, the monetary aspect. The artistic aspect then fades away and it gets unpleasant sometimes, because you are really eager for this show to play your venue, but the economic guideline prevents you from doing so. I would count that as a disadvantage of the position.”*

Since the job is highly time-consuming, even more when undertaken within the frame of a puzzled position where bookers are also in charge of marketing or coordination or management as depicted in the 4th piece of the study, **bookers do not always manage to listen to music**, or even to the act they book. If some of them are OK with facing that situation (usually when their own musical tastes do not align with the venue’s guidelines or when their selection process does not require them to assess of the quality of an act), many regret to be kept away from music listening:



*And I try to listen, but when times get stressful then I just, yeah, put it right back, I put it in a folder that says ‘to be listened to’. And then sometimes I managed to do it and sometimes I don’t. It’s really, it’s really hard to find the time, to listen to all and to give all a fair chance, yeah.”*



# PIECE 9 *Contemplating the puzzle: evaluating its matching skills*

## RESTORING THE BALANCE: A NEED FOR SKILLS AND COLLABORATIONS

Wherever it exists, this misconnection between music and booking can be pretty painful, even more when the difficulties are being reinforced by a versatility inherent to many music-related positions. As described earlier, on top of being a multifaceted job, booking often brings along a variety of other tasks or responsibilities to fulfil. Altogether, it may lead to a feeling of insecurity on the job.



Switzerland

**As a matter of fact, two thirds of the participating panel confess that they would probably or definitely benefit from extra training around certain responsibilities being incumbent upon them.**

When asked further about their training aspirations, the concerned segment of the panel indicates a need for skills around administrative matters (44%), such as learning how to deal with HR concerns, how to properly budget, draft contracts, or would need more insights about faire wages for both workers and artists.

Then comes the need for more precise data analysis (16%), with a vain wish for a tool that would help the booker to foresee an adequation that a given number of streams will result in a given number of sold tickets. Then comes a call for more extensive or regular bookers collaborations (12%), for deeper knowledge about audience development (13%) or musical environment (9%). The last one deals with soft skills, as far as team management or coordination are concerned.



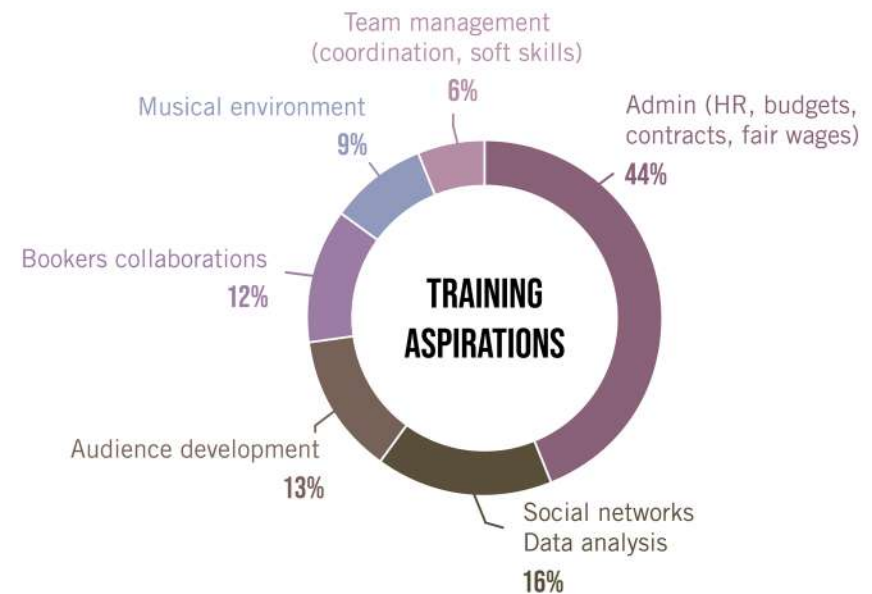
## PIECE 9 *Contemplating the puzzle: evaluating its matching skills*

The skills, knowledge or the tools then acquired might help navigating what one booker describes as a “pirate industry”. Even though many bookers underlined that they were working with link-minded colleagues, sharing the same core of values, they also pinned the predominance and the intensification of the economic guidelines that overshadow from time to time their artistic aspirations. In that context, the negotiation phase can be delicate to handle, especially regarding international acts.

A lesser acquaintance with certain regulations can then result in the loss of an offer, some competitive touring agencies or bigger agencies more knowledgeable than being able to take the pot or pull some strings that would leave the venue bookers disarmed. Such people “are known as pirates” for they use the fact that bookers are not always fully well-versed in negotiating or budgeting, leading to a bigger difficulty to assess whether a deal is a fair one or not. Beyond pirate battles, the overall music sector is also unanimously called to take a breath:

“It would be a huge help if the pressure would be a bit less, like if everyone would be 10 % calmer, more relaxed. But that’s also not something you can influence, I think.”

This puzzle piece then underlines a recurrent topic that has been debated in recent talks surrounding booking practices ([see here](#)): the ratio between the guidelines imposed by the venues, the guidelines imposed by the sector (in the shape of pirate deals), the guidelines imposed by society, sometimes depicted as an “editorial line”, and last but always least, the artistic guidelines, for which the role of the booker is also to make room for, even if some participants find it increasingly difficult, and prejudicial to themselves but also to the sector.



Dry Cleaning at EKKO in Utrecht, Netherlands © Anne-Marie van Rijn

# PIECE 10

Personal and professional overlap:  
The dangers of puzzling

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*I try to represent the venue identity. But as well, I have a bit of myself in that. Or I try to believe I have a bit of myself in that."*

# PIECE 10

*The dangers of puzzling: personal and professional overlap*

## I LIKE, I PLAY... SO I BOOK?

**The connection between personal and professional paths of the bookers have been intertwined since the first pieces of this puzzle:** the development of an interest in music that arise at a young age, the way the educational or professional background tend to be shaped in order to fill the industry requirements, the way venues HR departments shall reassess the amount of working hours on a regular basis, the possibly painful distance with music that the superposition of external guidelines may result in... The redundance of the topic made it worth investigating further. Some bookers tend to keep their personal musical interest clear-cut from the acts they book:



*I try to turn off entirely my personal preferences, also because the music I like personally are usually artists who operate very far away, and have less than a thousand streams on Spotify. If I would program them, it would be super expensive to get them here and we would sell 10 tickets probably. So I'm not the best reference for that."*

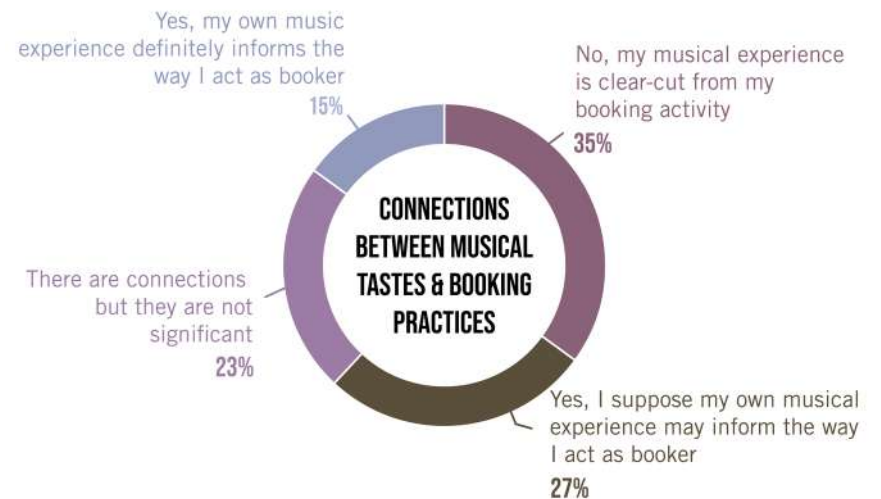
**However, the majority of the panel esteems that they book musical genre(s) that they personally enjoy, while also working with other genres.**

When their professional focus aligns with a genre that they personally enjoy, they have to navigate between the advantages of the precise knowledge they have of that given musical scene, and the risks of being possibly biased or lacking objectivity due to their prior fondness for a genre or an artist. When that is the case, they reason with their own preferences and urges and look at the acts they appreciate through a rational lens: they refrain from booking out of love only, but mobilize the guidelines to sort between the offers.

**The connection can be developed a step further among the bookers who have, or used to have, a musical practice of their own, for half of the panel observes that its own musical practice, informs the way they operate their choices in their booking position.** The insights they get from performing themselves are numerous: they "try to look at videos of live acts (if not visiting gigs themselves), looking for the enjoyment they felt themselves when playing music"; they "know how musicians think, what they find important", but they

are aware of what musician "usually do not realize (that a venue also makes costs, for instance, or that making music is not the only thing that's important about being a musician)". Furthermore, being or having been a musician "gives a certain sensitivity to feel the music [they] are listening too", thickening the emotional connection between the professional and the personal spheres of life.

## CORRELATION BETWEEN MUSICAL TASTES AND BOOKING ACTIVITY



## I BOOK, SO I STRESS?

If an acute sense of musicality or sensitivity to music may belong to the upsides of a booker's job, the art of puzzling with music has to be managed with caution, for the costs seem heavy. Many verbatim collected during the research process indicate that bookers occupy a position that easily gets unhealthy. "It requires self-sacrifice"; "it can get the best of you", "it takes such a toll on your life"...

The intense schedule and the time spent working both days at planning and nights attending or supervising gigs are among the main trigger for an inadequate balance between personal and professional life. When asked about the piece of advice he would give to a young or aspiring booker willing to enter the profession, one of the interviewees narrates:

*"I hired a colleague last spring, and she is, I think, 25. And I really drilled her heavily on "Are you sure this is the job you want? Because these are the disadvantages: be aware that this is very demanding. You might not be able to be fully relaxed ever, because there's always a possibility of your phone making a sound. Be aware of the fact that it can ruin the pleasure you have, the naivety of your music experience, because at some point you always have to think about how many tickets will we sell."*

This is worsened by the direct solicitations that the bookers constantly receive (on average, between 150 and 200 daily emails for the participating panel):

*"I don't know when it was, like just before the summer, or in May or something. And I took one day off and when I came back to my email inbox, I had like 200 emails. Just taking one day off. And then you're just trying to make up for it during the week."*

This "load of emails is really high" for the whole research panel, these "bombing mails" conferring a lot of stress to the bookers who constantly feel behind on schedule. Moreover, they also feel like they are "on watch", without being able to completely withdraw from their work.



*"I think that's the most stressful part of the job actually. I always have at least 100 unanswered mails in my inbox and it's just like, well, if it gets much over 100 it kind of stresses me, so I need to keep it under 100."*

As mentioned before, the overall sector might benefit from slowing down, for pressure do not only comes through the email pressure: many music professionals do work hectic hours in fast paced environment, and these unhealthy working habits are also susceptible to shed stress upon other workers who might tend to feel overwhelmed at the sheer evocation of a colleague's work schedule:



*"She was like 'I have to run tomorrow because I have that famous band playing there, and I have to be there at eight in the morning and then I have to set up my office, then in a few days I have to fly to Australia and then I have to go there...' And, you know, just talking to her make me feel stressed. And I know it's bullshit, like, it's nonsense to feel stressed because someone else is being very active but it generates a pressure like they have this super high standard, which makes me feel that I have to live up to that standard as well, which is not necessarily the case, but it does make me feel that way."*

Whether the pro/perso connection is fruitful, bringing positive musical emotion or a feeling of belonging to the bookers, or whether they suffer from the negative aspects of that connection, participating bookers all testify of real difficulty to establish boundaries between what belongs to the personal path, and what belongs to the professional one. Such trouble is at the very core of the Music Puzzle: not only does it appear as a defining feature or characteristic for being extensively and universally experienced within the panel, but the joys and sorrows of the bookers depend greatly of this healthy imbrication.





# PIECE 11

## Booking amidst work and leisure: Puzzling away

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*I find that very difficult to estimate because I cannot really define what is work and what is personal time. If I attend a concert that I organized, is that work or is that leisure? I wouldn't be there if I wouldn't have this job. But it's not part of my contract. It's not obligated for me to be there. So it doesn't count as billable hours. It is somehow expected that I do attend those events. It's a very grey area, so I cannot really say."*

# PIECE 11

Puzzling away: booking amidst work and leisure

This impossibility to draw the line between personal and professional contexts can be studied under the lens of the sociological concept established by the Canadian researcher Robert Stebbins. His numerous works allowed him to conceptualize the “[Serious Leisure Perspective](#)”, which explores the realities of leisure and work activities... but also of the continuum that exists in between them, switching a dual pattern with a continuous line along which a diversity of positions can be occupied. The bookers’ activities and feelings depicted over this study would then benefit from an analysis led through the lens of this sociological concept, for it would allow to observe the booking scene from successive perspectives, being either work, leisure, or in-between. One booker phrases his own in-betweenness that way:

“A lot of times when I do attend a concert, it’s not necessarily because I enjoy the music, but like... Being a booker, working for a venue, seeing happy people there, seeing your project grow, that’s also kind of a hobby so that it’s not necessarily only music that attracts you.”

## GETTING WORK DONE IN LEISURE TIME

Being in-between work and leisure, or being both work and leisure, can be portrayed through several characteristics. **The first one is the impact, or even the invasion, of work within leisure time.** It does not always feel like work, so the work is allocated way more hours than scheduled, and usually hours that are not paid for.

“And it makes it hard to like draw a strict line between your personal life and your professional life, but it also makes it fun in a way, because it does keep it interesting. I do notice that I still very much enjoy the concerts we put on and I can really enjoy like watching a show at our venue and then it doesn’t feel like work. But you’re still there, of course, and you’re still not doing anything else with other people.”

Consequently, the **line between work and leisure also fades away regarding personal sociability**, when the friends circles tend to be, again, a mix-and-match of “music friends” (since colleagues are mostly perceived as equally

passionate and like-minded, fostering the bonds between workers up to building close ties) and “other friends”... that bookers sometimes try to motivate into attending to the show their venue hosts:

“Yeah, but there’s this show at our venue, and you could come here, and then we can watch the show together, and I’ll be there anyway’ and they were like ‘yeah, we’re not going to do that, we’re just going to go to a different bar because you’re there too much, and you have to, like, come out as well and just join us and be like in a bar somewhere else and talk about something else than music.’ And it’s good to have people to sometimes pull you out of it and say, like, ‘yeah, you don’t have to be there every night you know’. Sometimes it’s difficult because it’s fun as well, and it’s easy and it’s like a very comfortable space to be.”

**On top of that “ongoing struggle”, the intermediate position explains further what have already been mentioned throughout the last pieces of the study: as a booker said, it may “ruin the pleasure, the naivety of [the] music experience”.** Attending a show for fun, as a leisure, brings professional wonderings along the way, about the costs, the number of people on stage, the gender representation on stage... It gets difficult to enjoy music for the sheer love of it, without embarking on professional considerations.

Each music interaction can suffer from that connection: listening to the radio while driving then comes with Shazam handy, in order to identify and note down a potential unknown nice music that would air during the trip. Hoovering at home becomes the perfect opportunity to listen to the “venue-related” Spotify playlist that some bookers constitute during their selection process, but that they can’t find time to listen to when they are at the office. Going for a drink with friends implies to keep the phone handy in case someone mentions a cool gig they attended to or an album they recently discovered. Scrolling the social networks in the evening implies to still keep an eye for music acts that friends or subscribers would have recommended, and when that’s the case, then the act got to be checked out straight away or written down to be remembered before being taken away in the newsfeed. Family gatherings are excellent opportunities for sharpening its audience development skills, between the elders and the youngers all promoting their favourite music over the same meal.

# PIECE 11

*Puzzling away: booking amidst work and leisure*

## GETTING LEISURE TIME IN THE WORKPLACE... OR REALLY CLOSE-BY.

These examples of what a booker calls “satellite work” is a first proof of the constant move that the bookers operate along the continuum linking work and leisure. These movements between work and leisure are deeply rooted: by way of an example, the panel is split in two perfectly even groups: one of them has always undertaken booking duties as part of a professional, remunerated experiences, while the 15 remaining bookers used to have (or still do) book artists in venues as part of a volunteer, freely granted service. Booking could then be perceived under three different ways: a job, a leisure that has been turned into a job, or a leisure and a job at the same time, with the same duties being taken care of within two distinct contexts.

Beyond booking, music itself blurs the dual work/leisure pattern further: **83% of the participating bookers mentioned that they engage with music-related activities outside of their already-music related job as a booker.** Their music-related leisure are rather diverse: music video making, teaching music, listening or reading about music... 80% of them are avid concert/festival/rave goers, attending to at least one musical event per month in addition to the ones they already attend to as part of their job.

Among the 90% of bookers who have already played music, they are 56% to still play on the side. The panel gathers (at least, some respondents did not give indications of the music played) 2 bass players, 4 guitarists, 5 DJs, 2 singers, 1 pianist, 1 keys player, and a drummer, some of them still having a musical career and performing to an audience. Moreover, they are 40% to undertake various volunteering missions within other venues than in the ones they work for (one even volunteers “in [his] own club”) but other regularly hit festivals, radio, music labels and record shops. **If some of them describe activities that pertain more to the “executive” side of the volunteer world (i.e. bartending) (see [Live DMA resource](#)), some are coming with heavier responsibilities: they manage, they produce, they teach... And they also book. The description of their “music out of the job” activities also encompass a different kind of booking: besides booking venues, some bookers do book artists or shows on the side, hence working from the other end of the booking spectrum.**

Volunteering then comes with heavier duty than for the ones who read and listen, and most bookers hence seem to confirm the relevance of Robert Stebbins’ concept of Serious Leisure Perspective when it comes to study their overall personal and professional journey.

## MUSIC OUT OF THE JOB



at Vega in Copenhagen, Denmark © Kim Matthai Leland

# CONCLUSION

## Further insights

**The study is to be perceived as a start to a bigger research process:** it anchors where any booking practices starts, in the realm of individual journeys in favour of music. It is meant to get to know the bookers and their processes, both at personal and professional level, in order to get a better view of where they speak from and a clearer depiction of the daily tasks they operate.

The booking position brings along many romantic conceptions of occupying a curating position: being the trigger of a musical discovery / emotion, participating into the development of a musical career for the artists, shedding light upon a niche musical genre, that would be freely operated by the bookers. While some of these incentives remain vivid, they are heavily weighted upon by **a series of constraints that put the idea of individual booking freedom at a distance.**

Understanding the highs and lows of the booking position and its interconnection with the personal, individual realities of each booker allow to get a better view of what is at stake behind the stages: the stress, frustration, pressure, and sometimes misconceptions between personal hopes and aspirations and professional requirements might be rooted within the working conditions (wages, work hours) but can also be due to a poor alignment of the personal aspirations that have motivated the application to become a booker, and the realities of the job once hired and settle within a venue. **Altogether, the work/life balance and the physical and mental health of the bookers appear among the hottest topics.**

A large set of responsibilities are then relying on the bookers' shoulders: the economic sustainability of the venue, the political and ethical guidelines, the audience expectations... Those constraints may be perceived rather positively as a game to play by, or as heavy constraints that block the way to a booking strategy that would be completely aligned with the bookers' individual preferences, motivations or opinions.

The fact that some of them do undertake booking duties as a volunteer beside their daily booking job is no hazard: the side booking activities are mostly undertaken to take advantage of the experience, knowledge and network

collected during the day job and to infuse them onto a different project that would be more aligned with their personal preferences, especially as far as the music genres are concerned.

**The study also underlines the persistence of a “booking bubble”,** since most bookers have been born and raised with music around, possibly music-education, and have ever since matured their connection to music through a variety of perspectives: listening, attending, playing... and then booking. Once on the job, their main inspirations come from their own circles: they work with colleagues and peers, seek advice from family and friends, and although several more collaborative processes have been spotted, there is still room for more “booking coordination” rather than “booking on my own” processes.

They seem rather called for by the bookers, since a majority of them take pride or comfort for the part they play in setting up events with a core social, educational, collaborative or inclusive component. **Furthermore, the recurrent feeling of pressure and/or isolation depicted throughout the study might be eased if the bookers' call for more initial training, professional certification, and bookers collaborations is heard.**

**This research is to be perceived as a starting point opening diverse perspectives. It shall be mobilized as a tool, a base to elaborate upon, a summary to initiate a debate or a reflection. It was not aiming to draft answers, solutions or recommendations, but to initiate further exchanges.**

Future works can thus be easily rooted in this study, but taken further:

- On a quantitative aspect, increasing the response rate to allow to cross variables;
- On a geographical aspect, identifying European hubs;
- On a qualitative aspect, investigating further topics;
- On a sectorial aspect, exploring in more details the meta-concerns of the music field;
- On an academic aspect, analyzing the results at the lens of sociological, legal or political frameworks;
- On a longitudinal aspect, keeping in touch with the participating panel to portray the evolution of their booking careers;
- To be continued!

# PIECE 12

## Overview of European puzzles: The extra piece

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The results displayed in this piece have been collected represent the participating bookers' programme over the course of 12 months: either the civil year of 2022, of 2023, or the season ranging from September 2022 to the summer 2023.

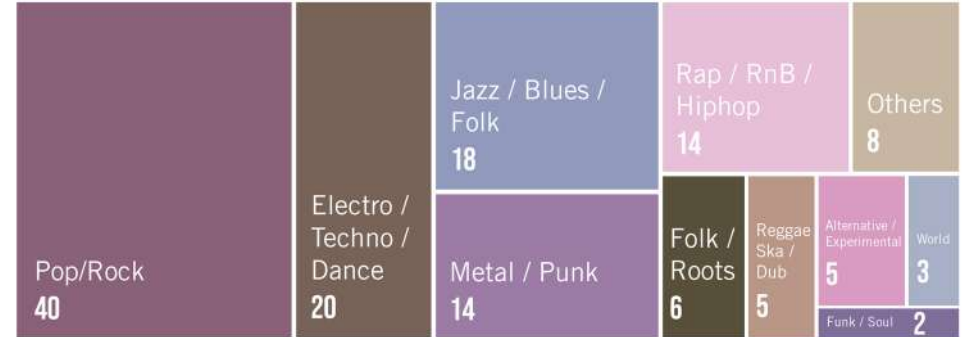
# PIECE 12

The extra piece: overview of European puzzles

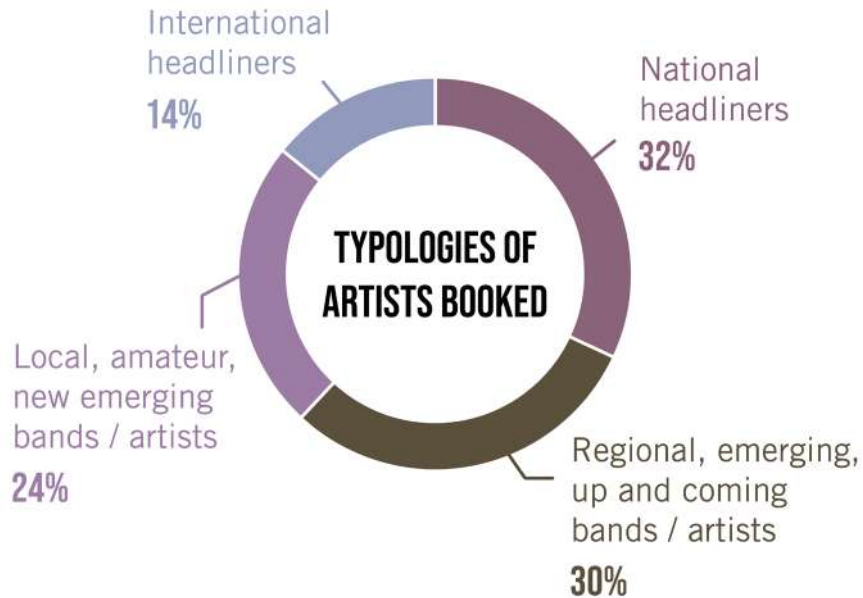
## ART FORMS BOOKED



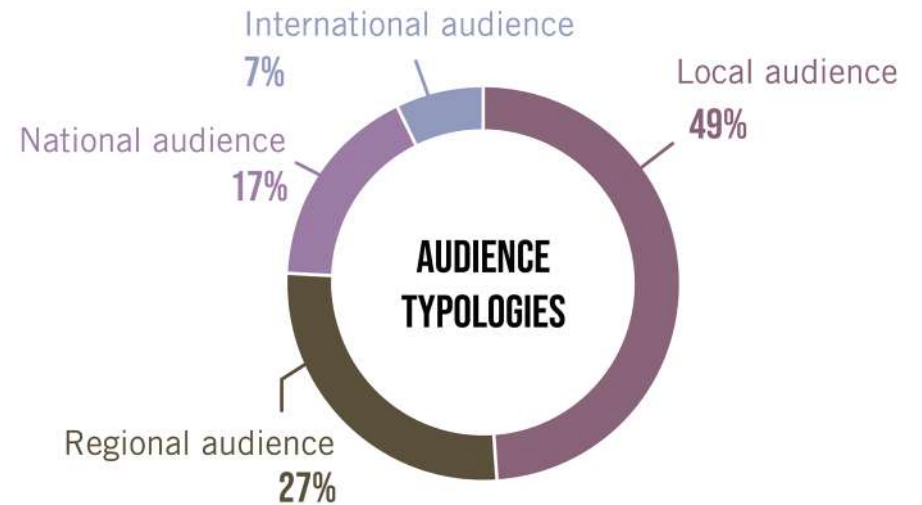
## MUSIC GENRES BOOKED



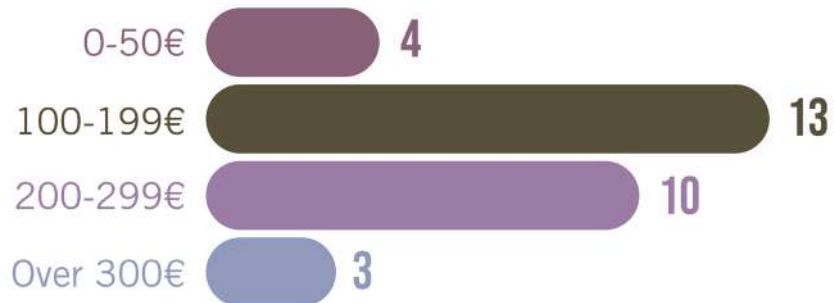
## TYOLOGIES OF ARTISTS BOOKED



## AUDIENCE TYPOLOGIES

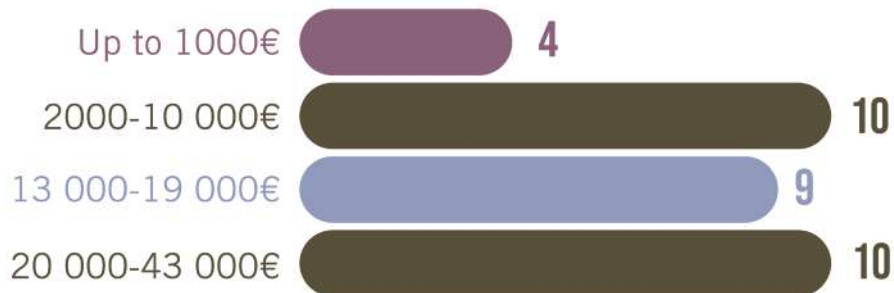


## MINIMUM ARTISTIC FEE PAID FOR IN 12 MONTHS



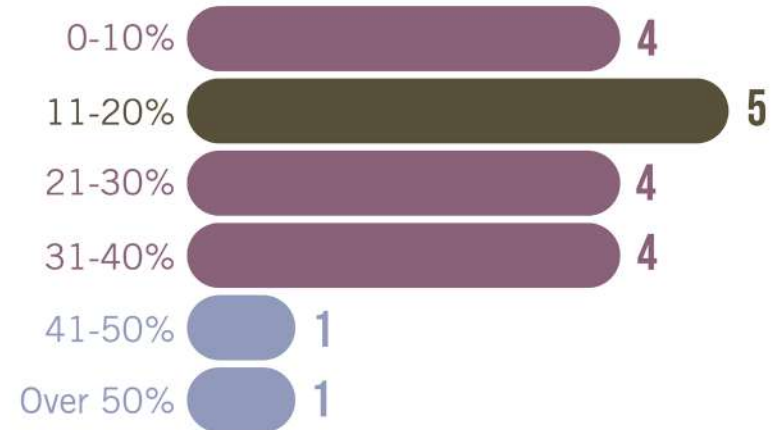
Lowest minimum artistic fee: 0€  
 Highest minimum artistic fee: 500€  
 Average minimum artistic fee: 175€

## MAXIMUM ARTISTIC FEE PAID FOR IN 12 MONTHS



Lowest maximum artistic fee: 30€  
 Highest maximum artistic fee: 43 000€  
 Average maximum artistic fee: 13 368€  
 Bigger gap-range between minimum and maximum artistic fees:  
 0€ / 25 000€

## SHARE OF THE ARTISTIC BUDGET WITHIN THE OVERALL VENUE BUDGET



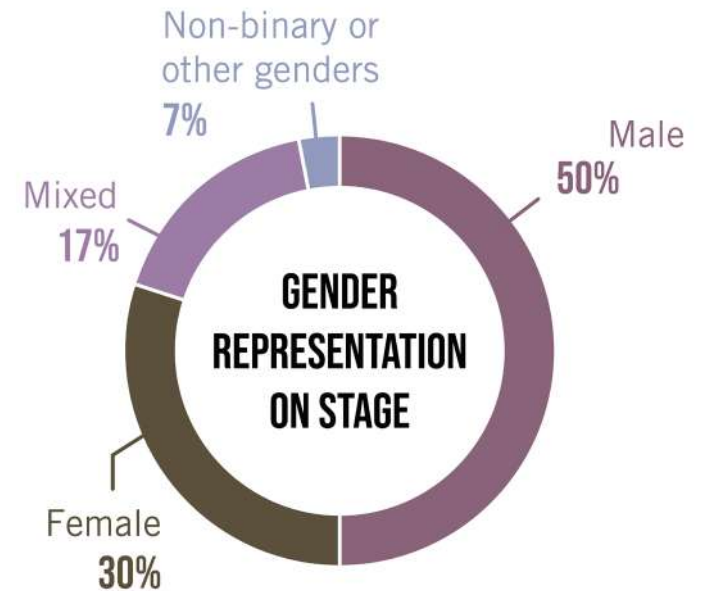
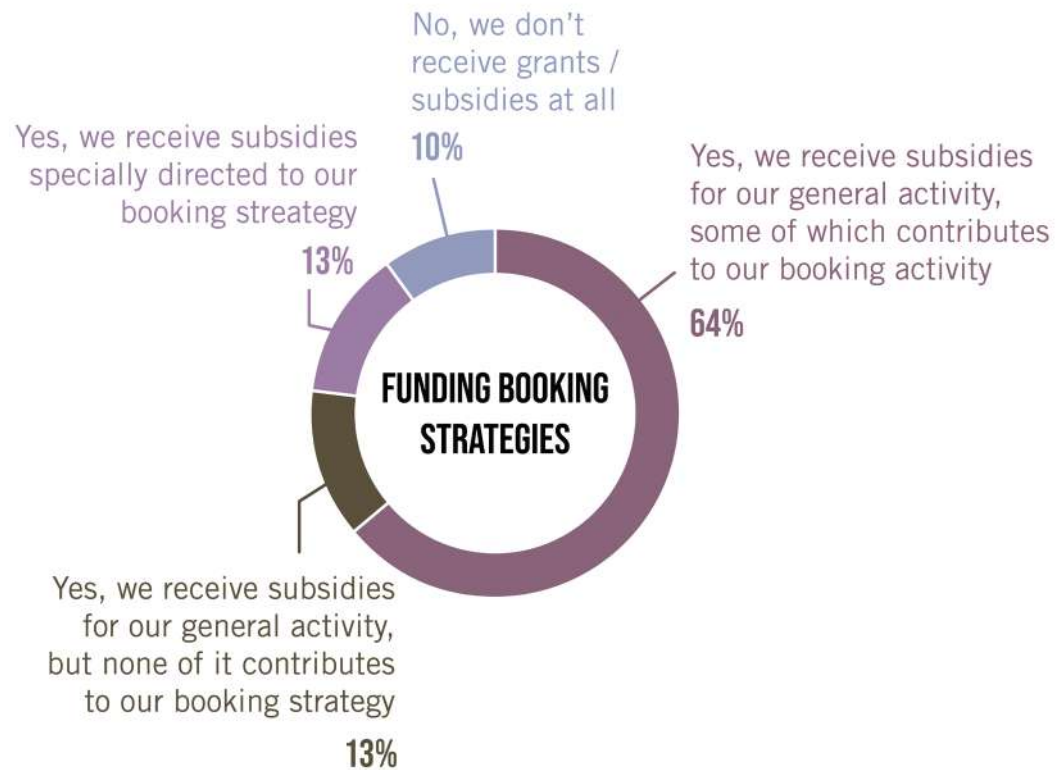
Smallest artistic budget : 350€  
 Biggest artistic budget : 1M3€

Smallest overall venue budget : 8000€  
 Biggest overall venue budget : 3M2€  
 Average share of artistic budget over the overall venue budget: 23%



# PIECE 12

The extra piece: overview of European puzzles





**LIST OF THE SHOWCASE FESTIVALS  
THAT THE PARTICIPATING BOOKERS ATTEND TO**

<b>NAME OF THE FESTIVAL</b>	<b>CITY</b>	<b>COUNTRY</b>
Amsterdam Dance Event	Amsterdam	The Netherlands
Babel 22	Marseille	France
Belgian Worldwide Music Network Meeting	Brussels	Belgium
BIME	Bilbao	Spain, Basque Country
Bise	Nantes	France
Booster	Enschede	The Netherlands
by:Larm	Oslo	Norway
Chouette Asbl Showcase	Sint-Niklaas	Belgium
Concours Circuit	Brussels	Belgium
Crossroad	Roubaix	France
Deep Dive Culture	Esch	Luxemburg
Dour Festival	Dour	Belgium
Emerge (Charleroi)	Charleroi	Belgium
<b>ESNS (quoted x16)</b>	Groningen	The Netherlands
Feria Hispano Lusa de la Industria Musical (FHLIM)	Zamora	Spain
Fifty Lab	Brussels	Belgium
Fight Pub Secret Show		
Focuswales	Wrexham	UK
FrancoFaune	Brussels	Belgium
<b>The Great Escape (quoted x4)</b>	Brighton	UK
Iceberg		
Inferno Music Festival	Oslo	Norway

# PIECE 12

The extra piece: overview of European puzzles



Printemps de Bourges + Les Inouïs	Bourges	France
Jazzlab Meeting Belgium	Mechelen	Belgium
KeepOn Live fest	Luglio	Italy
<b>Le Guess Who (quoted x5)</b>	Utrecht	The Netherlands
Left of the Dial	Rotterdam	The Netherlands
<b>Les Transmusicales / Les Bars En Trans (quoted x7)</b>	Rennes	France
Lollapalooza	Berlin	Germany
Lost In Music	Tampere	Finland
<b>MaMA (quoted x5)</b>	Paris	France
Fira Mediterrània	Manresa	Spain
Markedet for musikk	Larvik	Norway
MARS	Seinäjoki	Finland
Mercat de Musica Viva	Vic	Spain
Muziek Meeting Achterhoek	Doetinchem	The Netherlands
No Border	Brest	France
No Man's Land	Manchester	UK
Øyafestivalen	Oslo	Norway
Phoque Off	Québec	Canada
Piemonte Jazz Festival	Torino	Italy
Popronde	Eindhoven	The Netherlands
Primavera Pro	Barcelona	Spain
<b>Reeperbahn Festival (quoted x6)</b>	Hamburg	Germany
Risorgive Secret Sound	Centallo	Italy
Rototom	Benicàssim	Spain
Sofar Sounds		
SPOT Festival	Aarhus	Denmark

# PIECE 12

The extra piece: overview of European puzzles

SXSW	Austin (Texas)	USA
Tallinn Music Week	Tallinn	Estonia
Trondheim Calling	Trondheim	Norway
TROVAM - Fira Valenciana de la Mùsica	Castellón de la Plana	Spain
VNPF Congress		The Netherlands
Waves Vienna Showcase	Vienna	Austria
We Are Open	Antwerp	Belgium
Weekender Festival	St.Vith	Belgium
When COPENHELL Freezes Over	Copenhagen	Denmark
<b>Womex (quoted x3)</b>	Las Palmas	Spain



Anitsa at ESNS Showcase Festival © Eric Broere



ESNS © Eddy's Pics

# ABOUT LIVE DMA

## Live DMA, a collective voice for the European live music sector

Created in 2012, Live DMA is a European non-governmental network supporting live music associations. By nurturing exchange of information and good practices between its members and working as a collective voice for the sector, Live DMA aims to enhance the recognition of live music venues, clubs and festivals all over Europe, as essential cultural, economic and social operators.

The network is now composed of 20 members situated in 16 countries. The members are regional and national live music associations that represent over 3000 music venues, clubs and festivals located all over Europe.

In 2017, the European Commission recognized Live DMA as European network and granted, via the Creative Europe programme, funding to develop the network's project Live Style Europe. Live Style Europe is a "building capacity programme" with the objective to empower music venues, clubs, festivals, along with regional and national live music associations and to provide them with skills and tools in order to adapt to the changes of the music sector.

As member of the European Music Council, and the International Music Council, Live DMA is also actively engaging with other European cultural networks in order to make changes in the European approach to culture with the aim to include culture and the arts in the long-term goals of the European project.



**THANK YOU TO ALL THE BOOKERS  
WHO CONTRIBUTED TO THIS STUDY!!**



**DANSK  
LIVE**



**LIVE MUSIC  
ESTONIA**



**Norwegian  
Live**

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