etnološka tribina 45, vol. 52, 2022., str. 157-176

T'S ACTUALLY A JOB YOU ARE MARRIED TO

Work Experiences of Tattoo Artists in Croatia

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DOI: 10.15378/1848-9540.2022.45.07 original scientific paper, submitted 30. 6. 2021., accepted 8. 12. 2021.

The tattoo, once an indicator of belonging to subculture, deviant, and marginalized groups, or specific occupations, has become mainstream. Given that their social world has not yet been studied in much detail, this research aimed to explore the work experiences of tattoo artists. For the purposes of the research, semi-structured interviews with tattoo artists were conducted. The results show that for tattoo artists, tattooing is more than just a job – rather, it is integral to their lifestyle. Tattoo artists give particular importance to family and friends and support and belonging in both tattoo-specific and broader alternative scenes. With regard to cultural capital, a specific type of cultural capital, "alternative cultural capital," proved to be important.

Keywords: tattooing, creative industries, social networks, cultural capital, work experience

Introduction

Recent research (Wedel Kristensen 2015; Barron 2017, 2020) frames tattoos as a special expression of identity in late modernity (Giddens 1990) since an individual carefully reflects on their own identity when choosing a tattoo. According to certain authors, in the society of second modernity (Beck 1986), i.e., in a postmodern society (Featherstone 1991), individuals carefully choose available products, aestheticize everyday practices, express individuality, and shape their own identities. Yet, the tattoo is still in some places connected to stigma and stereotypes, and this view is gender and region biased (Thompson 2015). Tattooed women are more likely to encounter negative comments than tattooed men (Hawkes et al. 2004; Deal et al. 2010; Thompson 2015; Baumann et al. 2016), and discrimination against tattooed persons can also be encountered in job interviews (Thompson 2015).

Even though the beginnings of tattooing can be traced far into the past,[1] it has only recently become the subject of academic interest (Lane 2014). The tattoo industry has gone through many changes when compared to earlier periods, especially

1 For more on the history of tattooing see Kosut (2006), Thompson (2015) and Barron (2017), and for the Croatian context Čelik Karlović (2004).

since the 1970s, as explained by Sanders and Vail (2008), Thompson (2015), and Barron (2017). These changes refer to an exponential increase in the number of tattoo shops, technical features of equipment, artistic development of design, an increasing number of people with a trained artistic background, and women entering into the tattoo industry, as well as the popularization of tattooing (Thompson 2015).

This paper is based on research whose main objective was to explore various aspects of work experience from the perspective of tattoo artists. The research also attempted to examine the role of social and cultural capital in the work of tattoo artists. The attempt to understand the experiences of tattoo artists receives additional depth by using the concepts of social networks and embodied cultural capital, which has not yet been reported.

The first part of the paper offers an outline of the theoretical background. In contrast, the second part includes the research results divided into three thematic segments: becoming and being a tattoo artist, the social world of tattooing, and tattoo style as cultural capital.

Tattooing as a creative industry

The increasing popularity of tattoos, as well as the tendency for custom design, has altered the position of tattoo artists. There used to be fewer tattoo artists, and they were often themselves members of subculture groups, whereas today, there is an increasing number of tattoo artists with formal art education (Kosut 2013; Thompson 2015). In line with that, their social status has changed, and tattooing has ceased to be a marginalized and stigmatized practice. The expansion of university-educated tattoo artists also emerged due to the imbalance between the number of formally educated artists and the needs of the art world in the 1980s (Kosut, 2006). According to Kosut (2013), an increasing number of university-educated artists take up tattooing for economic reasons, which is particularly evident with female artists.

When discussing tattooing as an occupation, there are divergent interpretations of its classification within certain categories or fields of interest.[2] The reason for this is that one cannot become a tattoo artist through formal education. Examining the careers of tattoo artists, despite the fact that they are categorized as experts in arts and culture, Sanders and Vail (2008) perceive them as careers based on skills gained through apprenticeship, which does not allow for many opportunities for vertical mobility. According to Sanders and Vail (2008), mobility in the tattoo industry is possible only horizontally, i.e., moving from one tattoo shop to another without a significant change in salary and status or opening one's own shop.

2 For more on the categorization of tattooing as an occupation, see European Commission Skills Panorama web pages (URL: https://skillspanorama.cedefop.europa.eu/en/analytical_highlights/legal-social-and-cultural-professionals-and-associate-professionals-skills-0) and National classification of occupations under Croatian law (Official Gazette, no. 52/94, URL: http://zakon.poslovna.hr/public/nacionalna-klasifikacija-zanimanja/16523/zakoni.aspx).

Considering the nature of this occupation, which comprises the creation of creative content and creative services, tattooing can be analytically perceived as one of the branches of the creative industries.[3] However, authors Rašić Bakarić et al. (2015) do not list tattoo art within the classification of cultural and creative industries in Croatia.[4] With the remark of Kosut (2013) that tattoo artists used to be seen more as technicians or artisans than as artists, one may ask whether tattooing belongs to trades or visual arts in Croatia. Tattooing requires mastery and contains artistic elements. Moreover, Sanders and Vail (2008) relate it to commercial art and service work. The commercial aspect of tattooing is also mentioned by Hall (2014), who thinks that it can outshine its artistic character. Lesicko (2013) holds that tattoos could be classified under visual arts if their artistic features are considered, but sometimes tattoos appear in several copies, and it is not easy to assign their ownership. With all of this in mind, it can be concluded that tattooing belongs to trades or artisan crafts. Rašić Bakarić et al. (2015) also point out the significance of design in trades, which also proves to be a relevant factor for contemporary tattoo artists, as they value unique design and tattoos with a story.

The tattoo industry and creative industries also share other features: unpaid work, the precarious position of employees, and an increasing number of university-educated employees. Unpaid work is most evident at the beginning of one's career when one makes long-term investments in skills and expertise. The precarious position of those employed in creative industries results from atypical forms of employment, including self-employment, freelancing, short-term contracts, flexibility, mobility, project-based contracts, and the like (Gu 2014; Hennekam and Bennet 2017; Pinoncely and Washington-Ihieme 2019). Atypical forms of employment replace typical ones, and insecurity about the future is more pronounced while boundaries between work and leisure increasingly fade (Primorac 2012; Gu 2014). Earlier research conducted in Croatia points to similar trends (Primorac 2012; Primorac et al. 2020).

Social networks and cultural capital

Besides the initial economic capital that is necessary at the beginning of a creative profession, social networks and cultural capital have a key role in accessing and remaining in cultural and creative industries. Previous research has shown that individuals with large social and cultural capital, who can afford unpaid work at the beginning of their careers when studying for the job (Lee 2013), are at an advan-

3 The UK Government Department for digital, culture, media and sport (DCMS) defines creative industries as "those activities which have their origin in individual creativity, skill and talent and which have a potential for wealth and job creation through the generation and exploitation of intellectual property" (Gu 2014: 358).

4 According to Rašić Bakarić et al. (2015) cultural and creative industries in Croatia include museums, libraries and heritage, (visual) arts, music and performing arts, design, film, photography, crafts (traditional and artistic crafts), architecture, computer programs, computer games and new media, electronic media (television, radio, web portals), publishing, advertising and marketing communication.

tage. Social networks and cultural capital add to widening social inequalities in creative industries, as they can outshine the talent relevant for finding work in creative occupations.

Social networks are a frequent concept in the social sciences and can be understood in online and offline formats. Social networks based on social media can be particularly important in the early stages of career development in creative occupations. Namely, the majority of those employed in creative industries encounter various obstacles, such as minimal chances for permanent employment, which makes a career in the creative industries a unique challenge (Hennekam and Bennet 2016; Lee et al. 2018). These obstacles can be overcome by engaging on social media (Konrad 2013; Ansari et al. 2018; Barron 2020). Large but well-connected networks are the key to success, especially when they can help bridge structural holes, which, according to Burt (2004), are connected to higher levels of social capital but also creativity. Social media have had a positive influence on the public perception of tattooing and brought it closer to wider audiences, using tattooed celebrities as important intermediaries and influencers (Barron 2020). Social media are the spaces where clients can get information on and inspiration for tattoos (Wedel Kristensen 2015; Barron 2017, 2020). In addition, the online tattoo community is getting stronger by the day, and social media profiles such as those on Instagram have become digital and virtual portfolios, i.e., tattoo shops (Barron 2020; Force 2020).

Besides online social networks, offline social networks are emphasized in the context of finding work and support for unstable careers such as those in the cultural and creative industries (Lee 2013). An advantage is given to strong, personal connections, as opposed to superficial acquaintances and strictly business relations, which are considered to be weak ties (Granovetter 1973).[5] Personal connections with those employed in the tattoo industry (Sanders and Vail 2008) and personal or word-of-mouth recommendations from colleagues or clients are extremely important in creative industries (Watson 2012; Lee 2013). Given that post-transitional societies like Croatia are permeated by insecure working conditions, small networks based on strong ties, solidarity, and trust can prove to be successful for building a career in the creative industries. According to Tonković (2016), individuals who are self-employed in creative industries are particularly prone to relying on strong ties. The relation between the tattoo artist and the client based on conversation is crucial, whereas tattoo artists often manage the client's expectations and suggest possible changes, such as customization, for mutual satisfaction (Sanders and Vail 2008; Serup 2015). The tattoo industry is also characterized by conventions that represent sites of (strategic) networking, whereby tattoo artists have an opportunity to see the work of other artists, learn novelties in the tattoo industry and attract new clients (Thompson 2015).

5 Weak and strong ties are concepts introduced by Mark Granovetter (1973). Strong ties, such as family and close friends, are characterized by higher intensity and emotional affinity, while weak ties can have a superficial character. However, weak ties have several important roles in social networks, from facilitating the flow of information and bridging holes in network structure.

Cultural capital is one of the key concepts of Pierre Bourdieu (1983), who distinguishes between embodied (taste, knowledge, behavior), objectified (cultural goods, works of art, books), and institutionalized cultural capital (academic credentials). Earlier research of cultural and creative industries has shown that embodied cultural capital is often more important than its institutionalized and objectified counterparts, although all three types are interrelated (Mears 2014; Pinoncely and Washington-Ihieme 2019). Differently from earlier periods when tattoos usually appeared among members of the working class and subcultures, today tattoos appear in various social and professional groups and represent one of the indicators of aesthetic preferences. This is in line with Prieur and Savage (2014), who claim that in contemporary Western societies, people can choose among many aesthetic choices, which makes trends change rapidly. In the same vein, Thompson (2015) talks about the distinction between high-quality and low-quality tattoos based on technical and aesthetic execution. It can be said that this leads to the aestheticization of everyday life (Featherstone 1991).

It is increasingly difficult to determine the boundaries between art and everyday life. Members of tattoo subcultures refer to high-quality tattoos as artworks, and tattoo artists often adopt motifs from everyday life and turn them into art – such as tattoos of unique design. Low-quality tattoos are commonly connected to *scratchers* who use templates with the purpose of fast gain, and Sanders and Vail (2008) claim that these artists do not have a developed aesthetic disposition because they do not question the value of the tattoo. Such tattoo artists do not educate the client with regard to the choice of the tattoo, as opposed to tattoo artists who develop the design in collaboration with the client. The difference between high-quality and low-quality tattoos is best perceived by members of the tattoo community who share a similar habitus (tattooed individuals, tattoo artists, tattoo lovers) and whom Force (2009) identifies as members of the "tattoo subculture," These individuals usually belong to another subculture whose members have many tattoos such as punk-rockers, hipsters, hip-hop fans and others.

Methodology

This paper is based on research whose objective was to gain knowledge about different aspects of tattoo artists' experiences and the role of social and cultural capital in their work and professional development. Semi-structured interviews were used, which, according to Denzin and Lincoln (2005), are important for research focused on gaining a more detailed insight into insufficiently researched phenomena, where the open nature of the question leaves room for acquiring new knowledge.

Bearing in mind that this is still an under-researched phenomenon in Croatia, the study implemented a non-probabilistic sampling method known as the "snowball technique," which has proved useful in this type of research (Denscombe 2007).

The emphasis was on finding individuals familiar with the tattoo scene who served as connectors to research participants.

Before conducting the research, interviewees were introduced to the topic and research purpose, and their rights were guaranteed according to ethical research guidelines. Participants were either self-employed or employed in a tattoo shop, with some of them at the beginning of their careers while others had years of experience in the industry. In total, fifteen tattoo artists participated in this study, thirteen of whom were interviewed face to face, while two were conducted over video calls. The last one was conducted through a video call due to the *Decision on measures for combating the COVID-19 pandemic,* which included limited physical contact with others. The interviews were conducted in the period from January to March 2020, and the average duration of each was 60 minutes.

Audio recordings of the conducted interviews were transcribed verbatim using the online tool Transcribe and the application Transcribe. Notes taken during the interviews were copied and extended. Finally, coding on three levels was conducted, which, according to Richards (2015), includes descriptive, thematic, and analytic levels. The analysis resulted in the following analytic codes: becoming and being a tattoo artist, the social world of tattooing, and translating cultural capital into tattoo style.

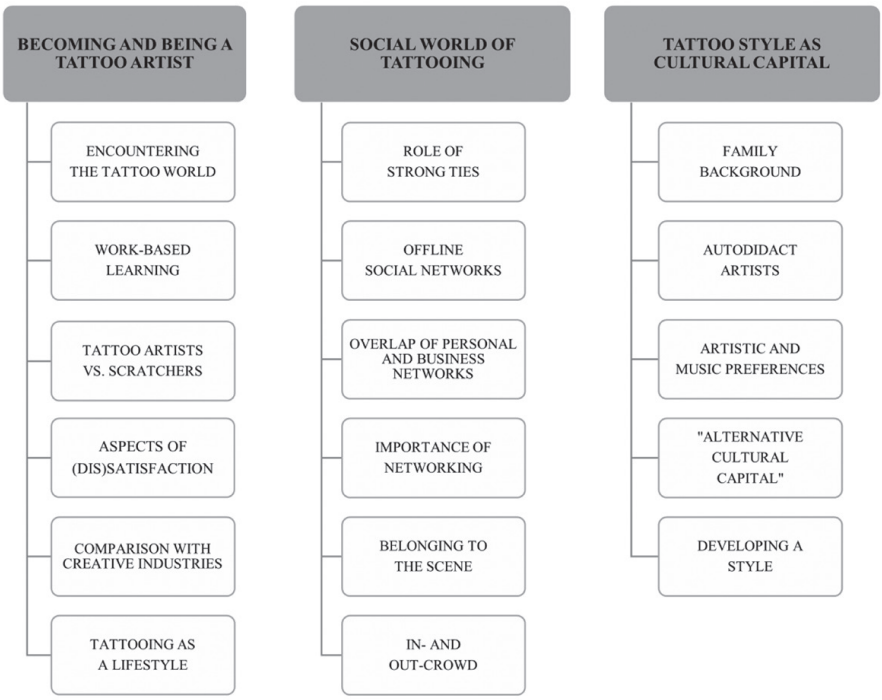

Figure 1. Graphic representation of analytic and thematic codes

Participant	Gender	Age group	Education level	Owner of tattoo studio
S1	Male	20-29	Secondary	Yes
S2	Female	30-39	Primary	No
S3	Female	20-29	Secondary	Co-owner
S4	Male	30-39	Tertiary	Yes
S5	Female	20-29	Secondary	No
S6	Male	20-29	Tertiary	Yes
S7	Female	30-39	Tertiary	No
S8	Female	40-49	Tertiary	Yes
S9	Male	20-29	Secondary	No
S10	Male	40-49	Secondary	No
S11	Female	30-39	Tertiary	No
S12	Male	20-29	Tertiary	Yes
S13	Female	30-39	Tertiary	Co-owner
S14	Female	30-39	Secondary	Yes
S15	Male	30-39	Secondary	No

Figure 2. List of participants

Research results

Becoming and Being a Tattoo Artist

This section follows research participants' path of becoming and being a tattoo artist by emphasizing how they started, through whom they were introduced to tattooing, and their experiences of being a tattooist. Their motivation for starting this career was based in their talent for drawing and/or finding a job to earn a living after completing an education in the creative sector (School of Applied Arts, Academy of Fine Arts, etc.). Interviewees were looking for *something [they] could potentially make a living from, for a creative job [they] can take pleasure from* (S7, 6–7). Entering the tattoo industry can be a challenging task if a person does not know a *gatekeeper*, since established tattoo artists are not open to sharing experiences (Sanders and Vail 2008). Research results show that this took place mainly by drawing tattoo artists into their social networks, including siblings, partners, and friends*: I've been lucky enough to be surrounded by friends, people who have been in this business for years* (S11, 13–14). Other participants who weren't that lucky had to rely on materials available on the

Internet and DVDs: *Today, the Internet has helped a lot, you search YouTube, and you can find various tutorials* (S12, 222). Once they entered this occupation, there was no turning back since they liked it so much that it has become part of their lifestyle. They do tattoos for work, but in their free time, they are involved in tattooing too, whereby they draw tattoo designs for appointments and get additional information about tattooing. The interlocutors are mostly surrounded by people who are tattoo lovers and with whom they share a common cultural capital, "alternative cultural capital," which will be discussed in more detail in the following sections. Tattoos are their main preoccupation but also the expression of identity (Wedel Kristensen 2015; Barron 2020), and based on that, interest groups, i.e., tattoo communities are formed. In their words:

> It's actually a job you are married to, that's not a job you only do, that's a job which you have to literally live for because even when I don't work I will be drawing drafts until 2 a.m. that day, so I still have homework every day, and that's fun. (S3, 18–21)

Tattooing as an occupation is not dependent on formal education but rather involves individual training resulting in specific skills and knowledge. Moreover, tattoo artists are trying to build a good reputation, adjusting a client's wishes to his/her own ideas. That is why they are so against *scratchers*. As it transpired from the interviews, in order to put an end to black market tattooing, an association of tattoo masters was established – Association of professional tattooists and piercers of Croatia – Croatian True Artist.[6] Increasing numbers of *scratchers* have occurred due to the wide availability of tattoo equipment which, according to one artist who has been in the industry for a long time, could previously be obtained only by tattooists employed in a tattoo shop. In the interviewees' opinion, *scratchers* do not possess artistic or technical competencies and are not familiar with hygienic standards a tattoo shop should observe:

> Scratchers are people who take a machine and start working at home or open their small shops without having anyone show them the technical aspects. They also haven't achieved the artistic level to take up tattooing, and very often they are not familiar with the basics of disinfection or the level of cleanliness of their working space. In short, tattoo artist wannabes who destroy human skin. (S15, 57–61)

The research identified points of satisfaction but also of dissatisfaction with the job of tattoo artist. The points of dissatisfaction in the work experience of tattoo artists before the crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic include the lack of leisure time and to working overtime, which caused health issues and limited their social life. Because of the pressure in the workplace and too many appointments, the interviewees could not find time to spend with friends or on hobbies: "I just don't have time to do

6 For more on this association see: https://uptp.hr/.

anything besides this job, I have so many obligations, and I'm so into it that even if I wanted to do something else, I don't have time at the moment" (S11, 32–34). They spend most of their leisure time drawing drafts for custom tattoos as commissioned by their clients, and therefore the boundaries between their work and leisure time are blurred. Primorac (2012) notices this issue in other creative occupations as well, often due to the atypical forms of employment.

The study participants had many complaints about administrative burdens, such as state regulations that are impossible to comply with, while state institutions are unaware of such problems since they are not sufficiently familiar with tattooing as an occupation. Dissatisfaction with bureaucracy is particularly present among self-employed tattoo artists due to taxation and other compulsory financial obligations.

Still, participants expressed satisfaction with working conditions in the shops in which they are employed. They are satisfied with the working atmosphere and interpersonal relations in the workplace. Most of them even spend their leisure time with colleagues: "Otherwise, the atmosphere at work is great, we often get some coffee and talk like this, what bothers us, what problems we encounter; we are real friends" (S5, 17–19). Female artists also point out that they have never encountered discrimination from male colleagues. However, they have received inappropriate comments from male clients: "Yeah right, there's no way a women will tattoo me" (S11, 310). Thompson (2015) also found that women artists encounter discrimination more often from clients than from colleagues. Other important actors in a tattoo studio are managers that tattoo artists find of great help as they are in charge of communication with clients. According to them, they are *a real-life saver* (S5, 16). Their job mainly consists of making appointments, which leaves tattoo artists with enough time for drafting designs and tattooing. Some interviewees think that without this, they would neglect tattooing. Even though research participants emphasized that it is not only about money and that they are primarily focused on creating a good reputation for themselves and unique tattoos, they also do not shy away from many requests for tattooing and the income they bring. They claim they're well paid: "There's a lot of work to do, but there's also a lot of money, our income is, I don't know what to say, people leave the country for this kind of salary" (S2, 103–104). However, male interviewees often expressed disapproval with clients' complaints about the price of work.

Similarly to other occupations in the creative industries, the tattoo industry is characterized by self-employment, project contracts, and invisible boundaries between working and leisure hours. However, tattooing is a specific occupation to which all conditions mentioned by Lee (2013) as necessary for accessing cultural and creative industries cannot be applied.[7] Advancement in the tattoo industry depends exclusively on personal work and the word of mouth of the people in this industry:

> (…) cause there's no one in this job who can make a shortcut for you, or something, you're here, your work speaks for you, it is very hard to reach a

7 According to Lee (2013), some of these conditions are high social and cultural capital, while individuals coming from a class background characterized by low economic, social and/or cultural capital need to work additionally on their reputation and exceed beyond others.

> certain position through a connection, you can't reach a position if you're not good enough and that's it, cause there's no blueprints, no one can replace you (…) (S11, 61–63)

Differently from some occupations, according to Sanders and Vail (2008) there is only horizontal mobility in tattooing, such as working for another tattoo shop without a significant difference in salary and status or opening one's own shop as the highest goal. However, tattoo artists try to perfect their own style, which will make them recognizable and will make clients choose them instead of others. Therefore, one could say that there are differences in status between tattoo artists, which can be linked to Bourdieu's concept of field. In this field, the field of tattooing, different actors with different resources face each other. For example, those who are just entering the field differ from those who have more experience. It is noticeable that in choosing mentors while doing an apprenticeship, young tattooists want to find an established tattoo artist who has already gained a certain status.

The Social World of Tattooing

Further to the previous section, this section shows the sources of personal and professional support that are crucial in the process of becoming and being a tattoo artist. The interviewees often emphasize the importance of support from their family and partners. This aspect is also stressed by Lee (2013), who holds that creative workers would not be able to stay in that sector if they did not have support from their families. This argument primarily refers to the beginnings of their careers when they mostly do unpaid work in order to gain necessary knowledge. The interviewees pointed out the significance of financial support from the family for purchasing expensive equipment or for compensating unpaid work in a tattoo shop at the onset of their careers: "The biggest help came from my parents, a lot of patience, a lot of money (…) they had somehow the biggest influence to continue this job" (S9, 21–23). Even though the aim of this research was not to map tattoo artists' class background, this shows us that most of them come from middle-class families with higher cultural capital, where family members are engaged in art:

> My sister is an art history professor and academic painter. (…) And in my family, we are very attached to art, my mother speaks seven languages, and it was very important to her to force us to do something else as we weren't good at learning languages, we were always attracted to art, acting, something, I was singing in choirs, musicals, I did scenography with my sister as a child, we went to puppet theaters a lot, we even went to the opera (…) (S3, 243, 249–252)

> Well, I remember when I was 10-11 years old, my mom went to the Dalí Museum and Van Gogh Museum, and then I was looking at books, my uncle and his squad were fashion designers, so I was exposed to that world too (S7, 87–90).

Very few tattoo artists in this research come from the working class. Hence they do not provide detailed descriptions of their cultural preferences. The fact that they engage in tattooing was not always accepted with enthusiasm by families in which all the household members have a university degree and in which parents are engaged in art. One possible explanation for this may have to do with the fact that people engaged in art are aware of the risks of work in the creative industries.

Besides family support, interlocutors emphasize the support of friends who encouraged them to take up tattooing. However, a few artists mentioned that they could not count on support from friends at the beginning of their careers because their friends, who are not engaged in any form of art, thought it was a passing phase or a whim. Participants, who could count on support from friends, have, since their youth, taken part in an alternative subcultural scene that is closely related to the tattoo scene and is mostly expressed through music preferences:

> Well, actually, already in elementary school, in general through a kind of subculture, music, lifestyle, in general, the music I listen to, all those musicians are tattooed, the entire culture is tattooed, all my friends, since I started hanging out with them, they were all tattooed. (S11, 38–40)

Tattoo artists usually hang out with people whose job or hobby is connected to creative expression. Their friendships can be traced back to high school (for example, School of Applied Arts) or were forged later based on common interests:

> (…) I mean when you go to that kind of school, there are the same profiles of people, more or less, the deviation is about 10-15%, people who did not know what to do with themselves, but I think that art is a general thing that leads such people, and then you find yourself in that circle of people, and people start profiling themselves in different types of art. So, for example, my girlfriend is first here, photography, there's one friend making rugs, this one friend is making music, so everyone is engaged in some segment of art, but in fact, that's all art, and that's the most important thing for me in life. (S6, 617–624)

> Well, I have a lot of friends who are engaged in some type of art, this one friend, we went to kindergarten together, he's also a painter, so I met a lot of people in that circle through him. (S7, 103–107)

They prefer to spend their leisure time with their employers and other tattoo artists too, which can be connected to the thesis posed by Gu (2014) that personal and business networks of cultural and creative professionals overlap thanks to blurred boundaries between working and leisure time. Sometimes tattoo artists make friends with their clients, and they describe their relationships as friendships based on mutual trust since clients are there to put something on their skin *that should last forever* (S2, 135). This is observed in a similar way by other researchers who mention informal conversations between tattoo artists and their clients (Gu 2014; Wedel Kristensen 2015).

Making a career in the creative industries can be a big challenge, particularly with regard to gaining permanent employment. Therefore, Lee et al. (2018) talk about the significance of strategic networking, which can help in overcoming these obstacles. The best opportunities for networking are created at events connected to the subject of the artists' work. According to Lange (2018), entrepreneurs in the creative industries usually have to balance pursuing their own career with belonging to the cultural or artistic scene. In this context, the term "scene" refers at the same time to the social networks of mutual recognition and to the places of gathering. The importance of belonging to the specific scene is especially visible in artistic communities in which artists usually establish multiple relations based on shared aesthetic and social values (Tonković and Sekelj 2018). In the tattoo industry, those gathering places are conventions and tattoo-related exhibitions. Conventions are singled out as important places for strategic networking where tattoo artists, apart from training, have an opportunity to meet other colleagues:

> I know many tattoo artists from all over the world. Mainly from conventions and visits. Tattoo artists like to keep together because we have many endless topics to discuss, and we always influence and inspire each other. Croatia has a very strong tattoo community. Actually, I would round it to Ex-Yugoslav countries. We all know each other and follow what is going on. (S15, 87–90)

The concept of a scene introduces the question of who belongs to an in- and out-crowd. While conducting research on tattooing and immersing herself within different tattoo scenes over the years, Kosut (2006) has observed how those inside and outside of tattoo communities view tattoo art and culture. In her analysis, Kosut (2006: 79–80) differentiates three areas that are part of the tattoo community: aficionados (tattooed individuals and tattoo artists), gatekeepers and experts, and media that come "from within the tattoo community." According to our research, it could be concluded that part of this scene is made up of (tattooed) people who share their interest in tattoo art, music taste, and overall a specific type of cultural capital, which could be called "alternative cultural capital." An out-crowd could be made up of those who get tattooed only because of fashion.

Good relations in the tattoo community are characterized by many recommendations. According to the interviewees, they usually know and respect each other. For instance, the interviewees state that in case they cannot meet a client's wishes, they will refer them to a colleague whom they believe to be able to make the tattoo in the desired way. Speaking of competition, interlocutors see it as healthy: "Well, there is more and more competition day by day, but I would say it's healthy because there is more work and someone who really wants to work, who works hard, always has work to do" (S8, 113–114). Further, tattoo artists often offer guest spots in their shops and choose to guest spot themselves, both in Croatia and abroad. Besides the Rijeka and Zagreb conventions, participants mentioned a private convention held in Zagreb. Hence, it can be concluded that these individuals are persons who share informal social circles.

Besides offline social networks, social media also proves to be of great relevance for tattoo artists, i.e. for advertising and presenting their work: "And now like Instagram, Facebook, it's now fully popular, I posted my first tattoo on Facebook, and as soon as I posted it I was literally full for two weeks. Yes, that's when it started" (S10, 29–31). For this purpose, they often use Instagram, which they describe as a virtual portfolio. Previous research (Barron 2020) has indicated that influencers are important intermediaries in advertising on social media, but the interviewees do not share this opinion:

> As far as influencers and bloggers are concerned I don't see how collaboration with them could contribute to my creative development. Maybe it could contribute to a fake image, which I could share with the public, if I were that type of person, via superficial social media systems, but it's something that our profession doesn't view in a positive light. At least not in my circles. (S13, 81–85)

The interviewees do not find collaboration with influencers necessary, as they provide fake numbers of followers as a potential measure of quality and an under-aged audience who still cannot be tattooed. Still, tattoo artists would gladly share on social media if a celebrity paid a visit to their tattoo shop, and it is celebrities that Barron (2020) sees as key intermediaries when it comes to, for example, the public perception of tattoos. Another problem with social media is that they can be a bad source of inspiration when a client wants an already existing tattoo seen on platforms such as Pinterest or Instagram, which is against the principles of tattoo artists whose goal is to make custom designs.

When comparing the significance of offline and online social networks in the experiences of tattoo artists, it can be concluded that tattoo artists are mostly oriented toward strong ties, which is in line with earlier research of personal networks in cultural and creative sectors in Croatia. According to Tonković (2016), entrepreneurs in creative industries in post-transitional Croatia rely more on strong ties and persons of trust than on wider circles of acquaintances. The participants consider the support of family and friends to be crucial:

> It is very important to me that I have the support of my parents, friends, my boyfriend, someone who will be there when you need them, when you have bad days at work or something, someone who will push you forward and maybe show you the brighter side of things. (S11, 154–156)

Tattoo style as cultural capital

Besides social support, cultural capital has been shown to play a significant role in creative industries (Lee 2013; Mears 2014; Pinoncely and Washington-Ihieme 2019). In addition to that, this section focuses on tattoo artists' artistic and music tastes, their family background, and how they translate their cultural capital into tattoo style. Considering the significance that the interviewed artists assign to cultural capital, it is evident that some of them come from families where art was discussed

frequently and whose other members already engaged in art (professionally or as amateurs). In such families, cultural consumption was encouraged in the form of attending exhibitions, theater performances, and similar events. Individual members of those families, including parents, were university-educated architects, academic painters, professors, businessmen, or lawyers. The participants from such families describe in detail their own preferences in art:

> I fully dig expressionism, in general Lautrec, Degas, I love Monet, I love the Secession, the Secession is like my favorite style of art ever, Mucha, I have three Mucha tattoos. I also love to play with perspectives, those are Escher and such artists (…) So yes, and we constantly bought art books, I got my first Janson in the third grade (…). I was waiting for The Art Book for five years, and so on, I don't know, there were always presents like books and some exhibitions. (S3, 85–92, 257–258)

> With respect to art, I appreciate all forms of art considering the period and the circumstances it was created in, but if I had to choose, it would be painting as something that I'm most drawn to. (…) I'm currently very much into abstract art and painters such as Kandinsky, Malevich, Miró, Rothko, and the like, i.e., that kind of spiritual sphere of the creative process and expression. I used to be an advocate of realism which was the main style of my expression, so one of my favorite painters is still Lucian Freud. (S13, 36–42)

With some artists whose parents were engaged in art, discussing art was not necessarily encouraged. If they discussed it, they had not necessarily been encouraged to engage in art professionally. The reason for this could be the belief that art is not a safe sector for employment, which was explicitly addressed by some interviewees:

> Yes, my dad is a great drawer. I really think I inherited that from him. He draws amazingly, but he didn't actually encourage doing art, which was a real obstacle in my development. I wanted to attend the high school for applied arts, but they wouldn't let me. Actually, he didn't let me because he didn't like the school idea, he was nagging that I'd be a loser, that there's no future after that, blah, blah, blah. (S6, 531–535)

As opposed to previous interviewees, some artists come from families where nobody engaged in art. Thus art was not discussed. However, they were educated in the creative sector, i.e., they attended schools such as the College for Textile Design and Faculty of Textile Technology. After realizing that they wanted to do art, they decided to become more familiar with the history of art. So, these artists were autodidacts in the process of studying art and in the process of acquiring cultural capital. In their words:

> Not really. We didn't really talk about art. In high school, actually quite a lot, I actually thought to do drawing and painting, so I went in that direction somehow, I used to go to exhibitions, and so that's how it all happened. (S8, 124–125)

Other interviewees come from families who did not discuss or encourage doing art, and the fact that the interviewees do art is seen benevolently by their families only thanks to their income. Therefore, these individuals do not give detailed descriptions of cultural consumption nor cultural preferences, and in their answers, they do not refer positively to world-famous artists: "So, Picasso and those, it gets on my nerves, what is that, I have no… " (S10, 93).

Another aspect of embodied cultural capital is music taste. Tattoo artists agree on one thing – nobody listens to turbofolk and commercial music. They often mention that they listen to different styles of music, mostly alternative such as old rock, indie, metal, jazz, and the like, which makes them cultural omnivores. Some participants' statements point toward the transfer of music taste from parents to children: "I grew up listening to rock because my dad listens to it" (S11, 74). The interviewees usually mention that they belong to the alternative scene, which can also explain their musical taste, as discussed by Force (2009). Namely, individuals with tattoos who are a part of tattoo subculture are most commonly a part of another subculture with which they share music preferences, such as punk-rockers or hip-hop fans.

As one of the key elements of belonging to a certain network or group of individuals Scott (2012) mentions embodied cultural capital that may be represented by tattoos, piercings, and fashion style. Tattoos become a special way to express identity in late modernity (Giddens 1990; Sweetman 1999; Wedel Kristensen 2015), while having tattoos is welcome among tattoo artists for "embodying" the job itself and the subjective experiences based on which they can answer client requests (Fisher 2002). Non-tattooed tattoo artists are even considered hypocritical by the interviewees: "Well, there can be quite a lot, I would say, hypocritical tattoo artists who don't have any tattoos themselves and what will you tell people when they ask you, for example, does it hurt?" (S14, 188–189).

Another important aspect of cultural capital is tattoo style. Tattoo artists mostly choose a certain style that they further develop. They often adopt art techniques they learned during their education: "(…) the faculty too had a big role in forming my style, it's where I got familiar with pointillism and adopted it, let's say, in my drawings and finally in my tattoos" (S6, 460–462).

The participants state that they attend tattooing seminars and various drawing schools as well. The tattoo artist's style is particularly highlighted as a form of embodied cultural capital when it comes to what they would not agree to tattoo. Rejections do not refer only to the technical ability to execute a tattoo or the aesthetic value of it but also to symbolism and the messages that the tattoos promote, which can say more about the beliefs and the cultural capital of the tattoo artist. The interviewed tattoo artists do not accept requests to tattoo ideological and hate symbols.

Institutionalized cultural capital did not prove to be a key element when explaining tattooing as an occupation, and the participants think that one does not become a tattoo artist through formal education. However, the interviewed artists mostly attended creative and artistic schools, both high school (for example, the School of Applied Arts) and college or faculty such as the Academy of Fine Arts, the De-

partment of Landscape Architecture, or the Faculty of Textile Technology. Having graduated, they looked for a job where they can creatively express themselves and earn a living: "(…) I studied painting, and somehow through that I stumbled upon tattooing, you know I was looking for something I could potentially make a living from, for a creative job I can take pleasure from" (S7, 5–7).

Similarly, Kosut (2013) explains that due to the imbalance between the number of educated artists and the needs of the art world, artists opted for tattooing in order to make a living. Some artists decided to be "creative omnivores" (Kosut 2013: 151) and simultaneously do classic art, such as painting, and tattooing, which is the case of two women interviewees in this research. Academic painters and a few other tattoo artists in this research, who have a high cultural capital coming from their families, obviously differ from the others when it comes to the description of their music and artistic preferences.

Conclusion

This research sought to gain new insight into the world of tattoo artists – about their work experiences, sources of social support, and the relationship between cultural capital and tattoo artists' styles. Therefore, semi-structured interviews with fifteen tattoo artists were conducted. Afterwards, research analysis yielded three topics: becoming and being a tattoo artist, the social world of tattooing, and tattoo style as cultural capital. The research results identify the importance of the support of family and friends, belonging to the alternative scene, and finally the tattoo scene through a specific type of embodied cultural capital – "alternative cultural capital."

The first topic, becoming and being a tattoo artist, brings answers to questions regarding how interviewees began tattooing, who was important to them at the beginning of their career, and what it is like to be a tattoo artist. The interlocutors decided to take up tattooing because they were talented in drawing and were looking for a creative job to earn a living. According to Kosut (2006, 2013) this is more often the case with people holding university degrees in a creative field. The interviewees overcame difficulties at the beginning of their careers with help from family, partners, and friends. This is in line with Lee (2013), who assumes that's almost the only way to succeed in a creative industry. Even though tattoo artists express satisfaction with their working conditions, they usually work overtime, which was also noticed by Primorac (2012) in her analysis of creative industries in Croatia. The interviewees work really hard to build a good reputation and show disapproval of the increasing number of *scratchers*, which also corresponds to other studies (Wedel Kristensen 2015; Steckdaub-Muller 2018).

According to the experiences of tattoo artists, offline and online social networks prove to be very important in career development. Many researchers (Sanders and Vail 2008; Watson 2012; Lee 2013) discuss the advantage of strong ties in the creative sector, which was also confirmed by research conducted in Croatia (Tonković

2016). This research points to a similar conclusion. The interviewees are more prone to close relations expressed through family support at the beginning of their careers and access to the tattoo industry through friends who are already involved in the scene. Besides social support provided by strong ties, making a career in creative industries requires online engagement on social media, which creates space for advertising (Konrad 2013; Ansari et al. 2018; Barron 2020). Similarly to that, interviewees use Instagram to present their work, but they pay more attention to the tattoo scene, i.e., social networks of mutual recognition and gathering places like conventions. Hereby, in- and out-crowds can be defined. An in-crowd could count (tattooed) individuals who share an interest in tattooing and similar music taste, henceforth "alternative cultural capital." At the same time, an out-crowd could include people who get tattooed for fashion value.

In addition to social networks, another aspect that has shown to be important is embodied cultural capital, whose role in creative industries is discussed by Mears (2014) and Pinoncely and Washington-Ihieme (2019). Similarly to the work of these researchers, embodied cultural capital in this research is manifested by tattooing style, tattoos, but also artistic and music preferences. One could say that in this field, alternative cultural capital, characterized by tattoos, piercings, and listening to alternative music genres, counts as embodied cultural capital. In the interviewees' statements about art and music preferences, differences can be discerned between respondents coming from families whose members are involved in the arts and respondents who do not have an artistic family background. As far as the tattoos are concerned, the interviewees tell of the difference between high-quality and low-quality tattoos, as also discussed by Thompson (2015). The research participants aspire to create high-quality custom tattoos, which often take motifs from everyday life and turn them into art, which points to the aestheticization of everyday life (Featherstone 1991).

The research results identify some similarities and differences with previous studies. On the one hand, similarities can be determined in the fact that interlocutors point out close contact to some of their regular clients based on mutual trust by designing unique tattoos, unlike *scratchers* (Wedel Kristensen 2015; Steckdaub-Muller 2018). Although gender differences in the tattoo industry were not the focus of this research, it has been proven that more and more female academic artists enter this occupation and still face discrimination by customers, similarly to the findings of Kosut (2006) and Thompson (2015). On the other hand, some differences were found despite "tattooing in the age of Instagram" (Force 2020). Similarly to Barron (2020) and Force (2020), the interviewees gladly use Instagram to advertise their work, but unlike their findings, these tattoo artists do not talk about influencers as important intermediaries. The research results also differ from those obtained by Sanders and Vail (2008) where no differences between tattoo artists with regard to status could be found. Analyzing interviews in this research, it is obvious that certain differences in tattooists' statuses do exist, for example, between young and established tattoo artists or professional tattoo artists and so-called *scratchers*.

Keeping in mind the absence of earlier sociological research of tattoo art in Croatia, this research sought to gain a deeper insight into the perceptions and experiences of tattoo artists as a starting point for future research that would preferably involve more interviewees from various national contexts. It could be helpful for future research to employ Bourdieu's (1993) concept of field in order to determine dominant and subordinate positions in the tattoo industry based on their differences in power and capital structure. Also, the research results suggest that it would be important to additionally study the position of women in the tattoo industry as they often encounter discrimination by clients. Both female and male artists claim that they are burned out, and this raises the question of whether female artists face precariousness in creative employment more than male artists.

This research has analyzed tattooing from the perspective of tattoo artists, but in order to gain wider insight into tattoo art in Croatia, future research should include audiences consuming tattoos, with a special focus on their motivation and experience of tattooing. Additionally, since tattooing represents one kind of body art and this paper has discussed "embodying" the job itself by tattoo artists (Fisher 2002), this phenomenon could be analyzed through sociology of the body, which is a relatively young discipline in sociology.[8] By placing tattoos within that conceptual-theoretical framework, cultural meanings attached to tattoos and tattooed bodies, and cultural pressures in terms of socially acceptable tattoos for male and female bodies could be explained, alongside their impact on body image, self-representation, and identity formation.

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank Karin Doolan and Hrvoje Pašalić and two anonymous reviewers for their valuable comments and suggestions. Any shortcomings are of course solely our own.

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8 The sociology of the body emerges with the publication of Bryan Turner's (1984) work *The Body and Society*. It has been further discussed in Chris Schilling's (1993, 1997) work and Turner's (2012) new edition of the abovementioned book, this time entitled *Routledge Handbook of Body Studies.* One of the leading journals in the field of sociology of the body are journals *Theory, Culture and Society* (1982 to present) and *Body & Society* (1995 to present) (Cregan 2006). One of the examples of the relation between tattooing and sociology of the body is explained in Fisher's (2002) article which was published in *Body & Society*, where the author has discussed "embodying" tattooing as an occupation in the example of tattoo artists who are getting tattoos themselves.

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"To je posao s kojim ste u braku". Radna iskustva *tattoo* umjetnika u Hrvatskoj

Tetovaže su se nekoć povezivale s pripadnicima supkulturnih, marginaliziranih i devijantnih skupina te određenim zanimanjima, dok su danas postale sveprisutne. S obzirom na to da je riječ o nedovoljno istraženom području, težilo se steći uvid u iskustva rada *tattoo* umjetnika i umjetnica. U svrhu istraživanja provedeni su polustrukturirani intervjui s vlasnicima i zaposlenicima *tattoo* studija. Rezultati istraživanja pokazali su kako je tetoviranje više od samog posla, ono je dio životnog stila. Posebno značenje sugovornici pripisuju podršci obitelji i prijatelja te tome što se smatraju dijelom *tattoo* i alternativne kulturne scene. Važnu ulogu stoga zauzima poseban oblik kulturnog kapitala – alternativni kulturni kapital.

Ključne riječi: tetoviranje, kreativne industrije, društvene mreže, kulturni kapital, iskustvo rada