

# MATCHING BEATS, BRANDS AND BELIEFS

Manifestations and Experiences of Commercialism and Professionalization in Electronic Club Music in the Netherlands

## **MASTER THESIS**

Leonard van Hout, student id 416668, leonardvh@student.eur.nl

Supervised by dr. Hans Abbing

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ESHCC, Erasmus University Rotterdam

## ABSTRACT

For a scene that is rooted in grass-roots, DIY-structured counterculture in the 1980s and 1990s, debated developments such as rising fees of ‘superstar’ DJs, festival culture undermining club culture, and instances of corporate brands engaging in the field for marketing purposes, may possibly cause friction with the values and ethos of those involved.

As various scholars have pointed out, professionalization and commercialization can corrupt artistic traits and (sub)cultural identities, which raises the question what the recent developments in the electronic music scene would mean to the beliefs, values, motivations, experiences and decision making of those involved – leading to the question central to this thesis: *How does professionalism and commercialism occur in electronic club music in the Netherlands and what does this mean to the values and experiences of the actors involved?*

The theoretical framework builds upon theory on professionalization, growth, genre developments, commercialism, art versus commerce and values. In-depth interviews are conducted with DJs, clubs and festivals, differentiated in scope, scale, location and focus.

The analysis resulted in a wide and nuanced perspective on the subject matters. Professionalism is in fact occurring, driven predominantly by a growing popularity and therefore a high competition. This high degree of competition, as well as experienced audiences and governmental regulations, drive organizations to professionalize their operations. This professionalization occurs frontstage and backstage, and is mostly illustrated by a strong service ideal in terms of quality and hospitality, and specialization within organizational structures. This professionalization is informal and non-hierarchical: bureaucratization of organizations does not strongly take place. The high competition, high costs, rising DJ fees and low margins drive organizations towards commercial decision making. However, commercialism in this field does not entail profit maximization for the sake of private gain, but rather commercialism as a means for sustainability and to cross-subsidize resources to enable experimental, non-commercial decisions.

Perceptions and attitudes towards professionalization differ vastly, though generally positive, as opposed to commercialism which is looked down upon, even though it is to some degree unavoidable. Music is generally not neutralized, in the contrary: non-commercial, inaccessible music can still attract full clubs. However, professionalization can cause the authentic experience to be neutralized, and there is some neutralization in the social and political aspect, and in the sense that it lost the countercultural aspect. Diversity and inclusivity are still central topics, though there are still challenges here.

**KEYWORDS:** electronic music, club culture, professionalization, commercialism, values.

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# 1. INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 The topic and its issues

It is dark, the lights are out, and all you see is some sporadic flashing light going over your head and that of those around you. Basslines, kickdrums, snares and synthesizer melodies vibrate through your body – you start moving, not by yourself but as one organism with those around you. Although experiencing electronic music in a club or festival setting can be a celestial affair as a visitor, it could almost escape you how much is actually going on behind the scenes. As charming as it sounds, it is not just you, the music, the DJ and the other dancers around you – it is all that, plus the bar personnel, bouncers, artist handler, backstage manager, stage manager, programmer, booking agency, marketing manager, production manager, and so forth.

Several signals indicate that in general, electronic dance music in the Netherlands has outgrown its do it yourself (DIY) phase and has grown drastically. However, taking a more historic approach, the dance music dominating the nightclubs of cities like Amsterdam today has its origins elsewhere. When house and techno music evolved from genres like funk, disco and also punk in the 1980s, it was a scene firmly rooted in the underground culture of cities like Chicago, New York City and Detroit (McLeod, 2001; Resident Advisor, 2018). In those days, these parties belonged to the working class and minorities - it was rooted in black, Latino and queer cultures. Parties in clubs like Paradise Garage in New York and The Warehouse in Chicago formed a safe haven for them to come together, dance and express themselves – in a certain way as a counterculture of people finding refuge from their oppressions at a place where they could be themselves. The atmosphere revolved around notions of freedom, self-expression and equality, and soon the PLUR abbreviation was coined: peace, love, unity, respect, which can be regarded as the ethos and moral guideline of those involved (Ott & Herman, 2003).

Later in the 80s and early 90s, house music spread across Europe and grew in popularity. Especially in countries like the UK, Germany, the Netherlands and on the island of Ibiza, scenes developed quickly. Eventually, dance music found its way into the charts and events became larger and larger. Eventually, many sub-genres emerged, and over time a clear distinction could be made between commercial and so-called underground, although these lines have always been blurry. As of today, this is most clearly visible in the difference between the type of electronic music that is played on the radio and in stadiums, the electronic dance music referred to as EDM, which in a certain way assimilated into pop music, and the more niche electronic music that is usually played in clubs – which is sometimes called *underground* (Böse, 2005; Meeuwissen, 2007; McLeod, 2001; Ott & Herman, 2003). However, this term “underground” is somewhat controversial and insufficient, in the sense that even the music that

is being described with underground is not that underground in certain ways, something which is dealt with later in this study.

Regarding the growth of electronic music, particularly the Netherlands is an interesting case. From the 90s onwards, electronic music has been relatively big in the Netherlands – with specialized radio stations and even genres originating in the country, like Rotterdam’s gabber music (Meeuwissen, 2007). Since the introduction of electronic dance music in the Netherlands, the growth in the Netherlands can be illustrated by for example large scale events such as Sensation by ID&T, Dutch superstar DJs and notably by Amsterdam Dance Event (ADE), functioning as the center of the worldwide dance industry for several days every year. Dance music has become an export product of the Netherlands, with both organizations and individual artists being successful internationally (Joustra & van den Butter, 2014).

For a scene that is rooted in minority culture and DIY-structures, recent developments are widely discussed in specialized media outlets. One of these issues include the rise in festivals – both in quantity as in size, resulting in difficulties for smaller players such as clubs and more DIY initiatives, due to factors like increasingly high fees of ‘superstar DJs’. This development was pointed out in an extensive article by Angus Finlayson (2017) which was published in Resident Advisor. Another aspect is the focus for artists shifting from artistic activities towards marketing skills, most notably on social media (Thump, 2015). In a later article in Thump, called *The Neoliberal Night Out: Why Clubbing Doesn't Feel Radical Anymore* (2017), the professionalization is addressed in terms of its consequences for the values and politics behind it. The commercialization and professionalization seem contradictory to the underground and niche characteristics of club culture. This also became evident in another article on Resident Advisor (2017), in which they announce the end of their “top 100” DJ poll. These annual polls were started in 2006 as a means to generate a certain recognition to the best the so-called “underground” offered, but the article states that changes in the scene have made these polls feel out of place. This is due to a homogeneity in the list that did not represent the diversity of this scene, which is “born in queer communities, shaped by people of color and populated by artists of all genders”, and due to this list reinforcing harmful power dynamics that are observed in the scene – which mostly benefit white male DJs (Resident Advisor, 2017). This illustrates the current issues in the field, where developments conflict with the values and niche characteristics of the so-called underground club culture. Many of these articles were widely discussed within the scene, and the main issues they concern are those of professionalization, commercialism and its effects, though the topic is approached in a journalistic way, leaving opportunities open to an academic approach to the subject.

There have been studies on various related topics, such as superstar effects among DJs (Meeuwissen, 2007), genre developments from avant-garde and scene-based to industry-based

(Lena & Peterson, 2008), and even of the growth and developments of electronic dance music (a.o. Anderson, 2009; Böse, 2005; Collin, 2018; Hesmondalgh, 1998; Ott & Herman, 2003). However, there has not been much research on specifically how these issues, as discussed in the journalistic articles mentioned above, exactly manifest itself and how this is experienced in the field. There especially is a lack of more recent work, and with a rapidly changing field this opens up possibilities for research. Also, in the Netherlands, a country in which electronic dance music has grown and evolved substantially, there have been studies on this growth (e.g. Joustra & Den Butter, 2014), though not taking experiences and the related values into account. Other relevant work is that by Gert Keunen (2014), who wrote a book about the alternative mainstream, and how this is positioned between the mainstream and the underground, though this is more generally focused on pop music – in this sense, a more focused application on electronic dance music would be interesting.

## **1.2 Objectives and demarcations**

The aim of this research is to further investigate this topic of professionalization and commercialism within electronic music, how it manifests itself in this scene or industry, what it looks like and what the relevant context is. And as a next step, how these developments or phenomena are experienced by those who are involved in the scene, since the roots of the genre suggest conflicting values. With this, the objective is to gain understanding in the workings of this field and specifically understanding in the subjective experiences of its actors.

As electronic music is widespread and takes many shapes, it is essential to differentiate between various distinct types as to pinpoint the boundaries within which this thesis is written. Electronic music encompasses many genres, of which the most dominant forms are heard on the radio and well-established in mainstream pop music, with artists like Martin Garrix and David Guetta being familiar names in the charts. As mentioned in a paper by Jan-Michael Kühn (2015) on the scene's economy, this music is characterized by its mass-production and its profit driven nature. This 'dance pop' is most often referred to as EDM or Electronic Dance Music - although the fact that not all electronic dance music is considered EDM makes this terminology far from perfect. On the other hand, there is electronic music that is not heard on the radio or played in stadiums but are more positioned within a certain niche. These types of electronic music, usually house, techno and related (sub)genres, are usually played in specialized nightclubs or festivals, and are part of (underground) club culture (Kühn, 2015). However, the distinction is hard to make, and as mentioned in the article by Finlayson (2017), also the underground is starting to show signs of professionalization and commercialization, so the question is where the line between the two can be drawn.

The differences between these two types mean that the two have vastly different industry ecosystems, accompanied by different values, types of firms and structures. Therefore, to investigate both would be both difficult and undesirable. The EDM side of music is in a certain way assimilated into pop music, as opposed to the underground club culture that is examined in this thesis, which seems on one hand to adhere to certain underground values but on the other hand also professionalizes. Therefore, this thesis focuses on the professionalization of the more niche electronic music rather than taking EDM into account.

Furthermore, as Keunen (2014) explains in his book, the music industry can be divided into three separate circuits: the performances circuit (of concerts, events, etc.), the sound carrier circuit and the publishing circuit, the latter of which are mostly related to record stores, record labels, and more recently streaming services. This study aims to focus on developments which are more related to the performances circuit (e.g. rise of festivals, rising DJ fees, the music's politics) rather than the recorded music and publishing circuit. Considering this, as well as the limitations of this research in terms of space and time, this research focuses on the performances circuit of the industry and leaves record labels and record stores out – although of course the musical content is still relevant and will be touched upon in the interviews.

Another demarcation that has to be indicated is that of the geographic scope of this thesis. As there can be differences as to which extent electronic club music has professionalized within certain countries, as well as because the Netherlands forms an interesting case, this thesis will focus on the Netherlands for a greater focus, convenience and feasibility of the research.

### **1.3 Research questions and structure**

The mentioned objectives of this research are aimed to be answered through the qualitative study of actors involved in electronic dance music in the Netherlands, more particularly through an examination of theory and through in-depth interviews with those involved in the scene. The following research question is formulated:

*How does professionalism and commercialism occur in electronic club music in the Netherlands and what does this mean to the values and experiences of the actors involved?*

In order to answer this, several underlying sub-questions are dealt with. First of all, what does the environment look like in the Netherlands – do players in the niche define it as a scene or as an industry, and what characterizes it? Secondly, to what extent and in which ways does professionalization and commercialism manifest itself in this specific context? In other words, what do these phenomena look like and what kind of indicators are relevant? Thirdly, what are the values of actors in electronic music that they deem important today? This relates to their



mission underlying their activities and what they find important, which also affects their decision making and experiences. Lastly, these questions come together in the question what the interplay is between professionalization and commercialism on one hand, and the motives and values of actors on the other.

This thesis is structured as follows. After this introduction, the relevant theories underlying the concepts relevant to this study are discussed and bundled in a theoretical framework. Subsequently, the research methods are discussed, including an extensive overview of the research design, the data gathering and the used sample. After that, the findings of the interviews are analyzed and compared with the theory from the framework. Lastly, the conclusion summarizes the main findings and discusses this research, its implications and limitations.

#### **1.4 Relevance and significance**

Earlier research on the relevant concepts has been done, as well as research on aspects of commercial versus underground in the electronic music scene. However, no specific research has been conducted on the current developments as mentioned in the journalistic magazine articles such as that by Finlayson (2017), or on their implications on the values the actors involved in the scene. Therefore, this thesis will contribute to the theory on professionalization of underground cultures or of culture/scenes/niches in general, on theory on electronic music scenes specifically and will add to the theory on how arts and culture organizations across various art forms deal with the dual aspect of commercial versus artistic motives. Also, it adds to theory on for example the development from small, emerging genres into an industry – as happened with other genres before and will most likely happen to future genres again. Findings of this thesis can also be applied to various other fields, including management and sociology.

Furthermore, although this is not an aspect that should be deemed as main signifier of relevance, electronic dance music is an industry responsible for a worldwide economic flow of money and countless jobs. According to the most recent report by the IMS, the global revenue of the EDM market in 2017 was 7.3 billion dollars (IMS, 2018). In the Netherlands, the market of electronic dance music increased by almost 70% between 2002 (82 million euros) and 2012 (138 million euros), and 1 in 20 jobs in the creative industries in the Netherlands are directly related to electronic dance music (Joustra & den Butter, 2014). For policy makers in the Netherlands, research on the developments in this field may be useful in determining policies since it offers insight and understanding of the workings of those active in this sector.

## **2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

### **2.1 Introduction**

The issues at hand cover various concepts that have been subject of academic study in various fields. In order to have a solid ground to build this thesis upon, the theoretical framework aims at clarifying these concepts, which are distinct but yet overlap and interrelate.

Firstly, a general overview of theory on professionalism and professionalization is provided, also giving attention to how professionalism has changed and how it relates to commercialism. Related to processes of professionalization are processes of growth and genre developments, which are discussed afterwards. Subsequently, a more thorough rendition of commercialism and how it coincides with arts and culture is provided. This is in turn related to the various values that are at stake and acted upon, which are discussed lastly. By combining theory from academic fields of economics, management and sociology, this thesis strives to approach the subject from the perspectives of various disciplines, though the personal definitions of the respondents are given attention in the analysis too.

### **2.2 Professionalism and professionalization**

In order to be able to investigate the occurrence, effects and contexts of professionalism and commercialism, it is first required to have a clear grasp of these notions in a more theoretical context. Whereas general daily use of the term professional usually refers to practicing a job to earn your income, different perceptions of “professionalism” and its meaning exist among academics, leading to a lack of consensus in this sense (Fox, 1992; Evans, 2008). As Evans elaborates, professionalism is not an absolute but a social construct which is every changing of nature and largely depends on contexts. Within the scope of this research, a short overview of different relevant perceptions of professionalism and professionalization is laid out.

#### *Defining professionalization*

Seminal theory on the concept of professionalization is that of H.L. Wilensky (1964), who examines the notion of professionalization of occupations and which factors can be regarded as determinant of that process. Wilensky differentiates between different jobs as being professional occupations in times in which labor work was professionalized, i.e. “became a profession”. Important to mention is that in the time in which this article was written, occupations such as doctor and lawyer were regarded as professional, not that of a carpenter or other more practical jobs. Though dated in this aspect, Wilensky’s article still offers relevant insights. Wilensky mentions the more traditional characteristics of professionalization as an increasing specialization, transferability of skill, emergence of standards and arrangements,

licensing or certification, and an increasing focus on the service ideal (a focus on service). However, Wilensky argues that the traditional view does no longer suffice, and coins three essential elements, which he formulates as a sequence of events: 1) the creation of the full-time occupation, 2) the establishment of a training school like specialized studies at universities, 3) the formation of professional associations, and 4) the formation of a code of ethics, both internally towards colleagues as externally towards clients. These events or elements characterize the movement from any occupation towards the occupations that were regarded as “professional”. Though the article is dated, these general notions of professionalization are still relevant, also within the scope of this research on electronic music.

Richard Hall (1968), working roughly in the same period, examined the relationship between professionalization and bureaucratization and draws on Wilensky’s elements. Hall explains professionalization as the process of moving towards the professional model, of which characteristics exist in two types: structural and attitudinal. The structural attributes of professionalization are those coined by Wilensky, and directly relate to the structure of the occupation, such as whether there is specialized education for specifically that occupation. Attitudinal does not lay directly in the structure of the profession, but in attitudes and behaviors relating to how practitioners view the work. Hall distinguishes five attitudinal attributes, namely 1) the organization as main reference, which can be either within a formal organization or as a more loosely connected or informal grouping with colleagues, 2) a belief in service to the public, 3) a belief in self-control and control by fellow professionals, 4) a sense of calling to the field, and 5) autonomy, i.e. able to make decisions without external pressures from clients or non-professionals.

The latter, autonomy, is one of the reasons why professionalism is sometimes mentioned as opposite to bureaucracy (Hall, 1968; Evetts, 2009). Hall ascribes several dimensions to bureaucracy, such as a hierarchy of authority, division of labor, presence of rules, procedural specifications, impersonality and technical competence. Although sometimes being mentioned as incompatible with professionalism, there are similarities between the processes of professionalization and bureaucratization in the sense of rationalizing and specializing labor. As Hall states, in bureaucratized organizations with highly developed division of labor, it is probable that there are professionals working since they are specialized for specific tasks, and professional people are more likely to be hired because of an emphasis on (technical) competence. On the other hand, he explains that bureaucratization can hinder professionalism of the individual in terms of autonomy and control, as a result of a more rigid hierarchy and authority within the organization (Hall, 1968).

The sequence of events which characterize professionalization as a process, as the four events of Wilensky (1964), is further examined and adjusted by Abbott (1991). He states that

the term 'professionalization' implies some sort of process which happens in one direction, being either more or less professionalized, yet it should be regarded as moving in many directions. Nevertheless, the term is still valuable, as it is mostly used more loosely and because there are certain patterns in which professionalization takes place. As said, though, this happens in different directions and the mentioned patterns are dependent on the perspective that is taken (e.g. local or national). However, the patterns Abbott distinguished consisted of the following elements: association, control of work, interest in professional education, pursuit of practical knowledge and dominated work sites. In general, the patterns he distinguished started with control (and possibly associations), the pursuit of knowledge and practical/professional education, dominated work sites and knowledge becoming scientific. Most valuable for this research is how Abbott described the control of work, as being usually a first event in professionalization. According to Abbott, control of work is related to a desire for professional and personal status, as well as economic security. Control of work also relates to attaining a certain quality (comparable to Wilensky's service ideal) and also involves matters such as licensing (1991).

### *New professionalism*

According to Evans (2008) and Evetts (2003; 2009; 2014), there have been developments and shifts in the definition and use of the term professionalism. As mentioned earlier, the constructed definition of professionalism differs greatly among academics. Having mentioned some more traditional perceptions, such as those of Wilensky (1964) and Hall (1968), it is also important to assess more recent interpretations.

A section in Evans (2008) gives an overview of some of these, in which some recurring elements can be noticed. Common thread here is again autonomy and control, as in control over the own work, and the normative/ideological aspect of expertise and quality of service. Furthermore, it is mentioned that professionalism is foremost an attitudinal and behavioral orientation, that it can be defined by management and how it is organized in institutions. Interesting is also the aspect of status: it is mentioned that professionalism can also be regarded as seeking to improve status, salary and conditions, which seems counterintuitive if you bear other attributes in mind, such as the service ideal.

Some of these more recent definitions can be related to the notion of "new professionalism", that Evans builds up to. This concept is elaborated upon in various texts by Julia Evetts (2003; 2009; 2014). According to Evetts, professionalism has changed, with the main aspects including changes in hierarchy, bureaucracy and output and performance measures, as well as the standardization of work practices. Furthermore, there has become more focus on competition and individualism. Evetts (2009) also mentions that within the concept of new

professionalism, professionals have a wider scope in terms of what they have to deal with: on the one hand to fulfil the service ideal (offer the best to the clients), but on the other hand to achieve this within limited financial controls. The result is an example of commercialized professionalism- a term borrowed from Hanlon (1998) and of particular relevance for this thesis.

#### *Professionalism's relation to commercialism*

One article in which this relationship between professionalism and commercialism is examined, is that by Strömbäck et al. (2012) which explored these notions in the field of journalism. According to their paper, journalists and newspapers have become professionalized, which shapes the working conditions for journalists and leads to less orientation on specific political parties (thus operating more independently). Journalists need to balance between various imperatives regarding professionalism and commercialism. On the one hand, they are drawing more on autonomy in the form of freedom of expression (as for professionalism). At the same time, an increase in competition for audiences and advertisers (also partly due to the internet and other new media) form a greater financial pressure and could lead to “more superficial, cost-efficient” journalism – with the focus shifting towards maximizing the audiences instead of putting emphasis on the quality of the work. The latter would imply that this expression of commercialism conflicts with the quality or service ideal attributed to professionalism, though according to Strömbäck et al., the professionalization and commercialization are trends happening at the same time (2012).

Hafferty & Castellani (2011) also mentioned commercialism and how it relates to the notion of professionalism, strongly perceiving commercialism as antithetical and corrosive to it. However, must be stated that this theory focused on medicine, a field in which it is indeed likely that commercialism and professionalism are counteractive forces.

Another article that examines this relationship between professionalism and commercialism is that by J.A. Stanley (1989), using the field of law as a backdrop. He mentions that over time, “the profession” has changed from its classical interpretations, which is interesting, considering this article is from 1989, yet he still stresses the service ideal and autonomy as main attributes of professionalism. Building on this, he addresses commercialism by referring to it as a motivating factor, in the sense that financial returns or compensations form the drive for their work. He mentions that the professional is entitled to payment for their services, though as long as his main incentives lay in the service ideal. If this would occur the other way around, i.e. financial gain as primary goal over “doing the job well”, it would undermine professionalism. According to Stanley, commercialism could imply that autonomy or independence is in danger. After all, it would mean that there is a regulation by “the other” (i.e.

acting for the other to achieve financial gain, an overly outward focus), rather than from themselves and their focus on the work itself independently.

However, in the cultural or entertainment field, this does not have to be as antithetical as in the fields of medicine and law. Cultural fields might behave differently (e.g. perhaps commercialism fosters professionalism in an effort to grow), which is why this relationship between professionalism and commercialism will be analyzed further on in this thesis.

Lastly, another factor that is relevant in relation to professionalization, is that of how financial means influence the operations and possibilities of organizations. According to Hellmann and Puri (2002), larger amounts of venture capital or the presence of venture capital during the earlier stages of an organization's development foster the processes of professionalization. In our scope, this would mean that independent organizations could generally demonstrate a lesser extent of professionalization (or at least a slower process in that) than organizations that are supported, sub-contracted or even built on the initiative of larger, maybe corporate companies – simply because there is less money involved.

### **2.3 Company growth and genre development**

Strongly related to the concept of professionalization and especially how it is undergone or undertaken by organizations, is the growth and development of those organizations.

Organizational and management theory on this subject is numerous, though not all relevant for this thesis. The focus is on basic theory on growth of single organizations itself and on the growth of musical genres. Since the latter draws closest to the main subject of this thesis, genre developments will be elaborated on more extensively.

#### *Growth processes*

In general terms, the growth of an organization can be regarded as part of the organizational life cycle, which is most commonly characterized by five stages: existence (birth), survival, maturity, and after that either renewal or decline (a.o. Cameron & Quinn, 1983; Lester, Parnell & Carraher, 2003). Growth happens mostly in the survival stage, which is also when the organization builds its reputation and develops, but also occurs in the stages of renewal and maturity.

To specify more on the growth that is happening in those stages, one of the more proven and tested theories is that by Larry Greiner (1972), who created a model of stadia through which organizations develop through evolution and revolution. Over time, organizations which grow larger move through different stages, each with specific crises (revolution) and undisrupted periods (evolution). The first phase is characterized by the evolution of creative expansion, which leads to a leadership crisis. In phase 2, when leadership crisis is overcome, directional expansion takes place, or growth through good leadership (after all, the leadership crisis is

overcome). In this phase, eventually a crisis in autonomy occurs, leading to phase 3: expansion through delegation. Responsibilities are delegated from the top layers downwards, leading to a control crisis. In phase 4, this is overcome by expansion through coordination. The following crisis is that of bureaucracy, affecting the efficiency and innovation of the company. The final phase is that of expansion through collaboration, in which the crisis of bureaucracy is overcome by better group dynamics and teamwork (Greiner, 1972).

These phases are not to be considered too strictly, and the extent to which they occur can also be influenced by context and for example anticipation to the possible crises throughout the growth of the firm. The relevance of this theory in relation to this thesis mainly lies in the fact that for discussing the growth of a field and growth of the individual companies in it, these phases as well as the mentioned lifecycles help create a clearer picture of the organizations and the stage in which they can be found.

### *Genre developments*

Essential work on musical genres and their developments is that by Jennifer Lena and Richard Peterson (2008). In *Classification as Culture: Types and Trajectories of Music Genres*, they examined 60 music genres by a set of social, organizational and symbolic attributes and constructed a model of four genre forms and the various trajectories in which they can develop.

Essential in assessing genres is to first demarcate what exactly entails the “genre”. As they summarize from various earlier theories, genres and their boundaries are of importance for organizing the production and consumption of music and all its relating organizational procedures. Furthermore, the notion of genre is relevant as it influences tastes, as well as the structures the tastes are part of. The use of the term genre in research has similarities with the use of concepts like scenes, fields, neo-tribes – especially in research focusing on the social context of music rather than its musical content or “text”. In this paper, Lena and Peterson themselves formulate the definition of genre “as systems of orientations, expectations, and conventions that bind together an industry, performers, critics, and fans in making what they identify as a distinctive sort of music” (2008, p. 698).

Following their analysis, Lena and Peterson articulated four forms in which genres can fit: avant-garde, scene-based, industry-based and traditionalist, with genres sometimes fitting in multiple of these forms. Avant-garde genres are relatively small, and its few members share a dislike for other (more popular) genres of music. This dislike, usually rooted in a regard of the music being too predictable or conventional, leads to a preference for music to be deviant or different from those established genres. Through social processes, listening to music, gathering and playing together with other musicians and discussing the music, they form a “genre ideal”. The focus here is generally to be innovative and to create something new, which drives them in

their experimentation with instruments and influences from other genres (Lena & Peterson, 2008).

Scene-based genres can be regarded as communities of artists, audiences and supporting small business people. For their definition, Lena and Peterson especially emphasize how the scene is spatially situated, focusing on local scenes. However, these local scenes can be connected to other local scenes in different geographical locations with similar music and practices, with which they are connected for example through the internet. This relates to the concept of the translocal scene of Bennett & Peterson (2004). Furthermore, and also congruent with Bennett & Peterson, there are also scenes that exist essentially virtually. These virtual scenes consist of fans, musicians and critics connected through the internet rather than geographical location. Considering that this article by Lena and Peterson was published in 2008, a decade ago, assumedly much has changed regarding the role of the internet, with purely local scenes more likely to transform into translocal scenes, and an increase in virtual scenes – for example like the many sub-genres of rap thriving on online music platform Soundcloud.

Focusing mostly on the more local scenes, Lena and Peterson ascribe several characteristics to this form, such as that conventions of how the music is performed and presented are quickly “codified”, as a result from the pursuit of new musical ideas. This can often be characterized by codified social conventions related to attitudes, language and clothing styles (2008), but can also lead to conflicts. Furthermore, this scene-based form is usually organized loosely, consisting of certain “rings” which differ in their commitment to the genre ideal, and which become more distinct as the scenes mature: from the inner ring with those most committed and most responsible for the scenes characteristics, towards outer rings with people who identify with the scene, people who regularly participate as fans and lastly people who sometimes participate but do not identify with the scene (Lena & Peterson, 2008).

Operating on larger scales, Industry based genres are characterized by the industrial corporation as the main organizational form, are located in the field of popular music and thus are market based. According to Lena and Peterson, industry-based genres are populated by multinationals and other companies competing directly with those multinationals, as well as artists (contracting for the services they fulfil), genre-targeted audiences and a wide range of ancillary service providers”, such as radio stations and publishers (Lena & Peterson, 2008, p. 705). The scale and scope of these genres is significantly larger than the other types of genres, requiring hundreds of thousands and fans. Market logic and corporate interest require an ongoingly increasing sales potential – and an incentive for the industry to counteract the development of new, emerging genres. In terms of content and texts, the genre conventions are usually simplified and codified to improve how it can be produced, measured and marketed. New artists are trained to work within these codified conventions, encouraged to make simple



music, clearly within the genre boundaries, and which would appeal to the masses. All this makes the music easier to categorize and therefore market the product, and thus functions as a strategy to enhance sales – although maybe Lena and Peterson let too much of their personal preferences or prejudices shine through here. In a similar way as these musical contents, contextual elements such as clothing and lifestyle are codified, exaggerated and mass-marketed to audiences. Another factor is that in the industry-based genre, advertisers see possibilities to capitalize on the genre's popularity as a means to promote their good or service. Furthermore, Lena and Peterson state how new fans can create conflict with other, more committed, longer-term audiences, and how it often leads to a discourse about how authenticity is lost. This conflict can lead some artists within the genre to develop new genres, which can be either avant-garde or traditionalist (Lena & Peterson, 2008).

This traditionalist genre form mainly revolves around adhering to performance techniques, rituals and history of a genre, trying to preserve and transfer the genre's musical heritage. The history is highlighted, for example by canonizing the classic performers and originators, and fans debate about and construct the origins and early developments of the genre. These fans come together at festivals, concerts and reunions, and are connected through newsletters, magazines and the internet. There is not much financial status involved in this genre, meaning that most actors rely on income from other sources. Also, Lena and Peterson mention how the division of labor between artist and audience is less clear as many fans engage in artistic activity themselves too. Furthermore, traditionalists can in a certain way be considered as purists, as Lena and Peterson mention how they have a negative attitude towards what they see as the consequences of commercial exploitation. Consequently, artists who practice these more corporate interests and values are looked down upon.

These four genre forms were expected to form some sort of trajectory which was expected to be universal: from avant-garde, to scene-based, to industry-based, to traditionalist. However, only a minority of genres followed this process completely or in this order. Other trajectories start at being scene-based and move towards industry-based, some start out industry-based, and in other instances certain forms are "skipped". In some cases, the genres were avant-garde and scene-based and never appealed to a larger audience or lost the genre ideal. In this context Lena and Peterson also mention "the three dance musics": house, jungle and techno, as developing within being scene-based (Lena & Peterson, 2008, p. 709). How Lena and Peterson assess the dance music genres within their research is interesting. The genres like house and techno are categorized as avant-garde and scene-based. However, many of their characteristics of the industry-based form also apply: there are large (international) organizations, large audiences and corporate interest from advertisers. Also, there are characteristics of the traditionalist form, although it must be said that some of those attributes

which Lena and Peterson ascribed to the traditionalist form, are maybe also as relevant for scene-based genres (e.g. fans who also perform or conflicts regarding commercialism). It seems electronic music has specific attributes which would fit in avant-garde, industry-based and traditionalist as well, but maybe most notably of industry based, which could exemplify its growth. Further on in this research, the data is used to further examine the current placement of electronic dance music in relation to these trajectories.

## **2.4 Commercialism and the culture industry**

### *Defining commercialism*

As mentioned in earlier sections, developments and growth can be linked to processes of professionalization and increasing commercialism. As discussed, the relationship between professionalization and commercialism is complex rather than clear-cut, and perhaps even more so in arts and culture. In order to have a clear understanding of what commercialism means in these fields, it is essential to define commercialism and its contexts.

General definitions of commercialism in daily usage revolve around aspects of emphasizing on profit or financial gain – both in terms of production and distribution of goods or services in a market. Commercialism often has a negative connotation, especially in non-profit sectors, and is perceived to undermine the service ideal or the idea of altruism. This negative use of the word refers to exploitation of objects for the purpose of private gain and profit.

According to Abbing (forthcoming), there are various uses and interpretations of “commercial” and “commerce”, all relating to the notions of money and “the market”. It generally boils down to matters like the pursuit of profit, economic values and compromise. Abbing refers to commercialism as striving towards this gain, as well as self-promotion, advertising and marketing. With the aspect of compromise, he implies renouncing autonomy in order to achieve that gain, either financially or immaterially.

In an article by Picard (2004), the occurrence and effects of commercialization are investigated, applied to a more practical case: the newspaper industry. Picard argues that economic pressures are becoming the main forces influencing the behaviors of the companies in this industry, and he characterizes it by seeking to exploit market potential and a behavior of self-interestedness rather than the broader interest of the audiences it serves – thus embodying the negative connotation of commercialism which was mentioned earlier.

This conflict between commercial interest and the social purpose of newspapers is especially interesting for this thesis, and is also mentioned in an article by Austin, Stevenson & Weu-Skillem (2006). In their article, they compare the notions of social entrepreneurship and commercial entrepreneurship. Social entrepreneurship is defined as innovative creativity with creating social value as underlying drive, as opposed to for example personal and/or

stakeholder gain, though the differences between social and commercial entrepreneurship are not dichotomous but rather a spectrum. This also means that social entrepreneurship is not exclusively non-profit, but it can also occur among for-profits.

In their article, Austin et al. articulate various differences between the two types. Firstly, they mention that social and commercial entrepreneurs differentiate in how they adapt to market failure. When commercial market forces do not meet the need and one speaks of market failure, commercial enterprises would avoid this domain, whereas this is an opportunity for the social entrepreneur. This can for example be illustrated by the notion of public goods, and is no exception in many art forms that rely on government subsidy – though usually not the case in electronic dance music. Secondly, there is a contrast in terms of resource mobilization. Social organizations are limited in the extent to which they can use the same capital markets as commercial organizations, mostly because they have to deal with an embedded social purpose and, in the case of non-profits, are restricted in the distribution of their (possible) financial surpluses. In terms of human resource management, this eventually means that social organizations can offer employees less financial compensation for their work, and employees are often compensated in other ways and have different motivations (such as ‘love for the job’ rather than maximizing income). Another difference between the two lies in the mission. Within social entrepreneurship, the fundamental purpose is to create social value, rather than financial gain or market share. However, this calls for a certain nuance: commercial entrepreneurs can also benefit society with their goods or services, and this impact can also be a driving factor, yet there is still a substantial difference in their main purpose and rewards. Lastly, there is a key difference in how performance is measured. The commercial entrepreneur can usually rely on relatively quantifiable and tangible measurements, such as revenue and market share. For the social entrepreneur, however, performance is not necessarily measured with these financial indicators, but are challenged with non-quantifiability, multicausality, a wider and more complex range of stakeholders, and differences in how the impact is perceived (Austin et al., 2006).

Although the authors do not address cultural value in particular, the way they use social value can practically be applied to cultural value, and the essence of the comparisons withstands. Cultural organizations, like social organizations are defined here, are also often non-profit or a hybrid form, which means they also deal with challenges in terms of performance measurement and resource mobilization. Also, they are usually driven by other motivations rather than merely private gain. The extent to which this applies to the field of electronic music is to be analyzed further on in this thesis. As the field of electronic music consists of both for-profit organizations, as well as smaller, more DIY initiatives, there is a difference in approach that is interesting to explore.

Perhaps this can be regarded as the differences between for-profit and non-profit, something which is assessed later in this research. Academic work on the topic of commercialization in relation to the differences between for-profits and non-profits is that by Estelle James (2003). She argues that, though it may seem paradoxical, commercialism is growing among non-profits. This blurring of boundaries is caused by various factors, such as industries in which for-profits and non-profits are increasingly competing within the same field, and non-profits converting into for-profits. Moreover, she mentions how non-profit organizations engage in both profit-making and loss-making activities, which as she explains can be regarded as *cross-subsidization* – the profit-making activities compensating for the loss-making activities as a means for sustainability, allowing organizations to grow, diversify and be independent. The latter is interesting to connect to the earlier discussed notions of professionalization. If commercial decisions such as engaging in profit generating activities are used as cross-subsidy within an organization, the commercialism is not undermining autonomy but in fact enforcing it. This fully depends on context though, and will be examined in the case of electronic music in the analysis of this thesis.

#### *Art versus commerce*

In the realm of arts and culture, there has been a long tradition of suspicion towards commercialism – both among some audiences and critics as among academic scholars. Various sociologists have addressed the notion of culture as being influenced by factors of economic commercialization and capitalism, generally noting a negative influence on the artistic traits of those (Anderson, 2009; Towse, 2014), and opposing properties of cultural products such as that of Caves' (2002) *art for art's sake* property that describes the artist's intrinsic motivation and care for originality, skill and craftsmanship, rather than economic returns. According to various scholars, commercialization challenges music's authenticity (Grazian, 2003; MacLeod, 1999).

Ruth Towse (2011) writes that scholars of the Frankfurter Schule such as Adorno and Horkheimer were first to write about "cultural industries", in this sense linking it to "low culture", produced in large quantities rather than by a "true artist". In one of their seminal works, *Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception* (1944), they coin the notion of *culture industry* and denounce how a commercial approach of art turns it into a commodity. Furthermore, they criticize mass culture and popular art, and critically assess the production of arts and culture in society which is of capitalist nature. In the end, the influence of this capitalist nature leads to standardization of mass culture and sameness, with corporations seducing audiences for their own gain.

Negative and positive perceptions aside, according to Negus (1999), this way of assessing how culture is produced is the *industry-produces-culture* perspective, which entails a

focus on how companies produce cultural goods and services that conform to commercial criteria and capitalist principles. Alternately, as discussed in Anderson (2009), Moore (2005) and MacLeod (1999), a *culture as industry* viewpoint means that as scenes and subcultures expand to larger audiences, cultural and artistic aspects are negatively influenced by commercialization.

Part of what many academics describe as the negative influences of commercialism and/or capitalism, boils down to Marxist or conflict theory, revolving around notions of social struggle, power dynamics and classes. This also applies to Pierre Bourdieu, a French sociologist whose focus was closely related to the art versus commerce dichotomy and its social implications, and who has written seminal works in cultural sociology on the differentiation between high and low art, habitus and forms of capital.

Most relevant for this thesis are the works in which Bourdieu addresses the distinction between commercial and artistic motives and notions such as artistic legitimacy. In his field theory on cultural production (1993), Bourdieu illustrates a field in which actors are in a certain position, which depends on their habitus (set of dispositions) and forms of capital – i.e. economic, social and cultural capital. He describes a field as follows:

*“[A] network, or configuration, or objective relations between positions. These positions are objectively defined, in their existence and in the determinations they impose upon their occupants, agents or institutions, by their present and potential situation (situs) in the structure of the distributions of species of power (or capital) whose possession commands access to the specific profits that are at stake in the field, as well as by their objective relation to other positions (domination, subordination, homology, etc.).” (1993, p. 97)*

The various dimensions along the field indicate a difference in for example autonomy versus heteronomy. Bourdieu distinguishes between large scale production and small scale or restricted production, two modes of production with each their different attitude towards context of the economy and audiences.

Large-scale production is characterized by an appeal to a broad audience, a short production cycle and conformity to existing demands and tastes. This is opposed to restricted production, of which the appeal is not towards the masses but towards a smaller audience of experts and co-producers, which has a longer production cycle, and which involves risk taking rather than conforming to existing wants. Whether art is produced in the large-scale or restricted mode is of influence on the type and characteristics of the art. Pop music for example is large scale and, according to Bourdieu in this theory, more aimed towards conforming towards existing tastes of the masses rather than risk taking or art for art’s sake motives. Avant-

garde art, on the other hand, is more small-scale and art for art's sake. Furthermore, different than arts for the masses and avant-garde art, Bourdieu also distinguishes *bourgeois art*, which can be defined as the dominant art form and regarded as conservative and retaining the status quo. However, also avant-garde art can become large-scale, when it is recognized and *consecrated* by the dominant institutions (Bourdieu, 1996). What is interesting here is Bourdieu's notion of routinization and/or neutralization (1985). The structure of products in the field of large-scale production is socially neutralized, and as art moves from small-scale or restricted towards large-scale, it can be subject to this neutralization too (for example artistically or politically).

The essence of these interplays in the field can be formulated as the opposition between commercial and non-commercial art. In this aspect, this can easily be applied to the electronic music scene. Smaller, independent organizations are situated towards the autonomous pole, since their drives are more art for art's sake rather than market driven, and they are more concerned with experiment or risk rather than conforming to existing tastes. Larger organizations, on the other hand, could be more focused towards audience demands. However, it has to be noted that the small-scale and large-scale distinction does not always apply, and especially in the sense of restricted versus unrestricted production. After all, unrestricted production (for example of electronic music) can take place in a market, and yet can still be relatively small or niche.

Over the years, theories such as that by Bourdieu have been widely applied but also criticized. Bourdieu's field theory could be lacking nuance (Keunen, 2014) and present polar opposites as if they are separated from one another, rather than representing a continuous spectrum in which artists can have various positions. Furthermore, the notion that large-audience, large-scale culture is low art is also challenged: according to Towse (2011), it has shifted and can in some cases also involve high culture.

However, commercialism in art is still looked down upon in many cases, as observed by Hans Abbing (forthcoming). He discusses the complex relation between art and commercialism in his book, and states that commercialism is still not fully accepted. But even though expressing commercial attitudes is looked down upon, commercial motives or being market-driven are not by definition detrimental to art. In fact, participation in the market can lead to autonomy, for example by aforementioned cross-subsidizing. An interesting aspect that Abbing assesses is that of sponsorships and advertisements. Companies can buy space for advertisement from art organizations or even artists in order to associate their brand to that of the arts organization. Eventually, the aim is that the brand can lift on the brand reputation of the art organization, thus gaining a better reputation among audiences. Abbing contemplates how this influences the decision making of art organizations. After all, they know that with certain actions, they can

attract sponsors which can be essential in the organization's sustainability, although Abbing mentions that sponsors are never neutral and wrong choices can undermine the art organization's reputation.

These notions of advertising and branding are also mentioned by Angela McRobbie (2002). She links the economy of club culture, which she extends over a broader level, to neo-liberalism, and elaborates on how corporate organizations 'buy into' the sector, for example by sub-contracting but also by advertising and branding. This sub-contracting, where a smaller organization is dependent from a larger mother company, or when independents rely upon income from sponsorships and advertisers, are factors that can cause independents to become more dependent (2002).

### *Commercialism in music*

Although theories like Bourdieu's field theory consider art and culture in general, and in that sense also cover music, there has also been study on the topic of commercialism in music specifically.

Of particular relevance for this thesis is research by Kubacki & Croft (2005), who examined the attitudes of musicians towards commercial aspects of music as a business. They observe that musicians tend to think product-driven rather than market-driven, and that there is a strong priority on the creation of music itself – anything that falls outside of that, such as aspects of distribution or sales, should ideally be done by someone else rather than the artist. The interviewees generally distanced themselves from being 'part of a business', and Kubacki and Croft state that musicians worried that assessing music as a business could push music in undesired directions, most notably where commercial gain is favored over artistic integrity. However, their respondents did feel urged to compromise with commercial realities – being commercial was seen as vital for generating a source of income, which especially applies to those who live off their income from music. The belief is that only the most talented can sustain without compromising, and otherwise anyone who does not compromise either complies to commercialism in at least some extent, has less chance of survival or needs another job as source of primary income. Subsequently, Kubacki & Croft state that commercial and artistic should not be considered as opposite ends within a hard dichotomy, but that artists can move in the between them, which requires a certain pragmatism but may be determinant of the sustainability of an artist's career.

This relates to observations by Gert Keunen (2014), who examined positionings of actors in pop music, especially in between mainstream and underground. Keunen builds upon Bourdieu's theory of fields but mentions challenges in applying it to pop music. Of course, there are instances of typically large-scale or typically restricted modes of production in pop music,

but Keunen argues that there is a large segment that is positioned somewhere in between those two. This is where cultural and economic arguments come together, and Keunen coins the term of *alternative mainstream*: where there is a mobilization of the small-scale mechanisms of distinction, but on the other hand a large-scale mode of production. He positions the alternative mainstream between the regular mainstream and the underground, of which the latter he defines as “separate little worlds of genre and music scenes, with their own infrastructural apparatus, cultural values and beliefs, and a rather limited social aura or effect” (Keunen, 2014, p. 55). Mainstream, on the other hand, is the music that is encountered everywhere, from the charts to television, and is aimed at a large consumer market of people who are not necessarily as into that music (Keunen, 2014). This notion of alternative mainstream is especially interesting for this thesis and is dealt with later in the analysis.

#### *Commercialism in electronic dance music*

Theories such as that of Gert Keunen do apply to various genres, though there is also study specifically on the topic of electronic dance music and the role of commercialism in that field.

The music’s roots in minority communities, especially queer and people of color, can be linked to the attitudes and values of the scene. One of house music’s originators, DJ Frankie Knuckles, coined the PLUR acronym for peace, love, unity and respect – an ethos that was strongly upheld throughout the scene (Anderson, 2009; Reynolds, 1998). The influence of this ethos and the roots in minority culture result in the culture being initially regarded as counterculture. Raves, a term for the often-illegal house and techno parties, were usually of Do It Yourself (DIY) nature: anti-establishment, unlicensed and grassroots-organized (Anderson, 2009).

Many of this can still be seen today. An article by Kühn (2015) explores the scene economy of the techno scene in Berlin, in which he notes that most people within the scene are not business-oriented or profit seeking. When seizing certain economic opportunities possibilities, they do so more to sustain their passion rather than to gain profit.

Anderson (2009) explored the influences of dance music and rave culture becoming more commercialized from a sociological perspective and mentions corruption of authenticity in dance music because of commercialization (Anderson, 2009; Hesmondalgh, 1998). She notes that as raves and electronic dance music gained popularity throughout the 1990s, its success attracted stakeholders “eager to develop the scene into a more professionalized one with commercial appeal” (Anderson, 2009, p. 309), after which electronic music became more commercial.

Matthew Collin (2018), in his book on the global dance music culture, writes that already in the 1990s there was debate over how the culture of raves and house parties became too large



and too commercial – causing it to lose much of its spirit (Collin, 2018, p. 7). Collin, who wrote a book on this topic during those times, retrospectively adds the nuance that during those early days, the commercialism was still at a low level compared to the developments that have followed it and that are seen more recently.

## **2.5 Values**

The debate around commercialism and art is, in a certain way, one of values: they revolve around different things that are deemed important, which can either in some way exist mutually or can conflict. These values are of essence in people's beliefs, preferences, behaviors and practical decision making – and are key in the concept of (artistic) legitimacy. Legitimacy can be defined as “a generalized perception or assumption that the actions of an entity are desirable, proper, or appropriate within some socially constructed system of norms, values, beliefs, and definitions” (Suchman, 1995, p. 674), which entails that values and beliefs lay at the core of legitimacy, and that in order to assess what is considered legitimate in the field of electronic music, one should take the values of the actors involved into consideration.

It is important here to differentiate between different types of values, since value can be considered in more ways rather than merely a monetary ‘price’ that is attached to something. According to cultural economist David Throsby (2000), value is in essence the origin and motivation of all economic behavior – but in this sense, prices can be regarded as merely an indicator of value rather than a direct measure of it. Though, here the distinction should be made between value as a singular and values as plural: Throsby addresses value as a singular, as in ‘the value of something’, which is different from values as a plural, referring to moral principles and beliefs.

Throsby also differentiates between economic value and cultural value, driven by the idea that cultural goods and services can hold values that cannot be easily expressed in an economic sense. Throsby illustrates that for example while considering a painting, cultural value can consist of different characteristics, and distinguishes six types. Firstly, he notes aesthetic value, which lies in aspects of form, such as harmony and beauty. Secondly, there is spiritual value, which can be related to religion but also more secular enlightenment. Moreover, social value revolves around the connection with others or comprehension of society. Furthermore, historical value is the aspect in which a work can reflect the time in which it was created and how this can place the present into perspective. Perhaps most interesting is the symbolic value, which Throsby explains by stating that cultural objects “exist as repositories and conveyors of meaning” (p. 29), Lastly, Throsby distinguishes authenticity value, which refers to the artwork being real and unique (Throsby, 2000).

Though some of these values and how they are explained seem more focused towards

the visual arts, these six types of values which constitute cultural value are an interesting starting point when assessing cultural products. Although these values are mostly revolving around the reception of cultural goods, from the perspective of the audience, for this thesis it would also be interesting to track which are central for those active in the production side.

Another perspective building on these different notions of values is that by Arjo Klamer (2017), who coins the notion of the value-based approach. This approach entails a framework that focuses on motivations and values behind actions and decisions, both of individuals and organizations. Klamer positions his framework in a certain way as a counterapproach to standard economic theory, which focuses on resources such as money, which are only of instrumental value according to Klamer. The framework he offers can be useful in this thesis for determining the drives, motivations and values of those active in the electronic music scene – to be for example classified by type of good that is strived for, organizational types and spheres of valorization.

What is essential in the value-based approach is the *telos* or the purpose of an actor – in the case of an organization for example often concretized as the mission statement. According to Klamer, generating financial gain is never the real purpose, but actions are directed towards values and *goods to strive for*. These goods are not goods in the usual sense of the word, but can rather be either tangible or intangible, such as a physical object but also relationships or communities. Among intangible goods, Klamer distinguishes *hypergoods* such as happiness, justice, and fulfilment. Furthermore, Klamer divides goods into four dimensions or categories. Social goods are related to concrete relationships people engage in, such as friendship, community, neighborhood and family bonds. Personal goods are what people strive for individually, including for example freedom, wisdom or dexterity. The remaining two are perhaps most interesting, as they to an extent beyond the individual. Societal or common goods have similarities with social goods, but rather than revolving around personal relationships of the individual, it relates to larger communities on various scales. Examples include tradition, justice and solidarity. Lastly, the transcendental good ‘transcends’ the other three, in the sense that it refers to goods such as truth, beauty and enlightenment.

Klamer further operationalizes these goods by using the term valorization, with which he refers to the actualization of the values. These values are also divided into categories: personal values, social values, societal values and cultural values. With personal values, Klamer means those values that can be held by an individual, such as knowledge or education. Social values are related to human relationships, such as the value of sharing. Furthermore, societal values concern larger social entities, for which he uses examples like caring and compassion, although there is overlap between these values and social values. Lastly, and perhaps most interestingly, are the cultural values, such as artistry and aestheticism. These four categories are quite similar

to the four types of goods, which can be somewhat confusing, though the defining distinction is that the goods are used to realize the values, and the value is what makes the good worth striving for.

Klamer's framework and value-based approach fluctuate between abstract and concrete, and are in that sense not always as clear and easy to apply. However, for this thesis it can be a useful tool to identify the drives and motivations of actors by framing them as goods or the values they strive for, making those more practical to address and analyze.

### 3. METHODOLOGY

#### 3.1 Research design

The research question of this research is formulated as follows:

*How does professionalism and commercialism occur in electronic club music in the Netherlands and what does this mean to the values and experiences of the actors involved?*

The sub-questions that underlie this question are the following:

- 1. What defines and characterizes the environment of the scene or industry in the Netherlands?*
- 2. To what extent and in which ways does professionalization and commercialism manifest itself in this specific context?*
- 3. What are the values and motives of the actors involved in electronic music?*
- 4. What is the interplay between professionalization and commercialism on one hand, and the values and motives of actors on the other?*

In order to answer these questions, the research design should match the objectives that are implied by them (Bryman, 2012).`

The research methods employed in this thesis are qualitative, meaning that the whole process of gathering and analyzing data is solely of qualitative nature. As this thesis tries to shed light on the subjective experiences of those involved in the scene, as well as their decision making which depends on their beliefs and values, qualitative research is the most suitable research design. After all, in particular qualitative research with an inductive approach is suited for focusing on subjective interpretation and gaining understanding of contexts (Bryman, 2012). Quantitative methods could be useful to map certain relations and/or causations, though it is not relevant within the scope of this study since it aims at establishing a thorough and more in-depth understanding of the *how* and *why* behind the topic and the choices, perceptions, motivations and values of those involved. It was not the aim to achieve statistic generalizability, but rather than to gain insight and understanding in the respondents' situations and their subjective experiences (Bryman, 2012). Subsequent for its qualitative nature, this research follows an inductive process, which according to Bryman (2012) entails the formulation of theory on the basis of gathering data, and in that sense also no hypotheses are developed.

More practically, the research design is cross-sectional, as it entails the collection of data of multiple cases at a single point in time (April and May 2018) with numerous variables

(Bryman, 2012). Furthermore, this research has elements of exploratory and descriptive research, as it aims at 'mapping' a field and its relating issues, contexts and processes.

### **3.2 Research methods**

The realization of this research consists of several stadia. Firstly, theoretical work is done in order to find and highlight relevant work that has been done on the relevant concepts of this study, which forms the foundation of the research. That is, for example, necessary for sampling and composing an interview guideline that is rooted in theory.

As this research focuses on those involved in the scene as actors with each their own subjectivity, the chosen research design is that of interviews in order to gain insight in their experiences, decisions and views (Bryman, 2012). The interview type was that of semi-structured, in depth interviews: the interviews were conducted with a series of pre-determined topics and questions at hand, while maintaining latitude to ask other questions when this seemed relevant (Bryman, 2012). On one hand, this made it possible to maintain a comprehensive overview, to make the various interviews more effectively comparable and ensured that all relevant topics were discussed, while on the other hand maintaining a certain freedom to take surprising, unforeseen side-paths or to dive deeper into particularly relevant matter that was not anticipated upon. The interview guide consisted of all themes and relating sub-themes (see appendix).

The interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim, after which the transcriptions were coded by theme, analyzed and compared. The themes from interviews were connected between one another, as well as linked to the theoretical framework to gain insight in whether those correspond or contradict – possibly resulting in the synthesis of new propositions in terms of theory.

### **3.3 Sampling method**

For this research, the aim is to achieve representative sampling, where the sample represents the population as accurately as possible, as if it were a microcosm of the larger population (Bryman, 2012). However, in order to achieve that in the case of this research and its limited sample size, a random or probability sample would not suffice: random sampling only 10 participants would result in a high chance of not including outliers and typical cases. Therefore, the sampling methods of this thesis are mostly those of purposive sampling, in which the sample is based on those who are relevant to this research (Bryman, 2012). In this case, this means sampling those cases who are relevant in examining professionalization and commercialism in the electronic music industry. In earlier stages of the process, forms of convenience sampling such as snowball sampling were anticipated upon, since it was expected that some artists and

people active at larger organizations would be less eager to cooperate due to time restrictions or matters of secrecy regarding confidential information. However, during the stage in the sampling process in which the possible respondents were actively approached, it became clear that most of those approached were in fact willing to cooperate, thus allowing to minimize the need for convenience sampling.

The sample size is that of 10 participants, stratified into three categories, which when combined cover all those involved in the scene and related to the topics of this research: artists, clubs and festival/event promoters. Within these three strata, the sample consists of various different types of cases: representative or typical cases and extreme or unique cases. The typical cases consist of those who are representative of the larger population of those active in the scene, for example middle-sized festivals or clubs, who can exemplify the broader category to which they belong (Bryman, 2012). On the other hand, some cases can be regarded outliers and are in that sense unique or extreme cases, such as a club that is not operating in the public sphere like most clubs, but illegally and “underground”. This way, a more diverse and wider range of cases is reflected in the examination, thus creating a complete image of the issues.

### **3.4 Sample description**

In order to achieve an overview and understanding of the matter that encompasses not only one perspective, but an industry-wide perspective on professionalization, the sample includes people who are active in the scene in various ways. In that sense, the population can be regarded as everyone who is strongly connected to club culture and is of influence or influenced by the professionalization or commercialism of the scene. Practically this would entail artists, event promoters, club owners, record stores, record labels, but also audiences.

However, following Keunen (2014), the industry can be divided into three separate sub-circuits: the performances circuit (of concerts, events, etc.), the sound carrier circuit and the publishing circuit, the latter of which are mostly related to record stores and record labels. However, as mentioned in the introduction, the focus of this research lies more on developments relating to the events, festivals and DJ performances and its contexts rather than those of the recorded music itself – the performances circuit. Therefore, it is opted to focus on event promoters, club owners and artists, and not on record stores and record labels.

Furthermore, including audiences in the sample would have been unnecessarily difficult to sample (after all, it is difficult to determine which fan is sufficiently involved for offering resourceful insights professionalization and commercialism) and would take the focus away from the production side of the scene, which is where professionalization is likely to be more of influence. Audience members would be more likely to only see the effects of professionalization and commercialism which are visible for them in their experience as a visitor, and to a much

lesser extent what happens 'behind the scenes'.

Within two of the three categories, clubs and festivals, it is not an individual but a team of people working together. In this sense, it was relevant what the position was of the respondent in relation to the organization as a whole, and to what extent he or she represents the views of the rest of the organization. Practically, it would mean that possible positions of people to be interviewed are owner/director, programmer, general manager, marketing and communications manager, production manager, etc., while interviewing more practical positions (such as that of bar staff) was excluded.

The sample of these three groups is suitable and can be justified for this research as it covers a wide range of variables. Besides covering clubs, festival organizations and artists, it includes parties operating on all different scales: from start-ups to scale-ups to established players. Furthermore, they cover actors operating out of different rationales: from an independent illegal club to festivals/clubs initiated by investing mother companies. Also, since the electronic music environment in the Netherlands can be regarded as scenes in different cities with all different contexts and slightly different characteristics, it was vital to include actors from the main cities in this sense: Amsterdam, Rotterdam, Utrecht and The Hague.

### *Clubs*

The first category consists of four clubs. Across the three clubs, a range is covered over three different cities and across different ways in operating. This way, a diversity in scope and size, both dependent or independent, legal and illegal, start-up and established, is covered. The relevance of this group lies in the fact that clubs deal with the various supposed effects of professionalization and commercialism directly: higher fees, more structured organization and bureaucracy, and balancing commercial and artistic aspects. Furthermore, they are the ones who perform a gatekeeping role and determine who is given a podium to perform in front of an audience.

Club 1 is an independent middle-sized club located in Rotterdam. The club started small several years ago, moved locations and grew steadily into an established club in the local scene. The programmed artists varied from relatively well-known international artists to local, lesser known artists. The interviewee was one of the founders of the club, responsible for more business-related tasks. Club 2 is a small independent club, formerly located in Amsterdam as it was not active anymore during the interviewing. The club was illegal and secret, and audiences could attend on subscription basis, and its programming is more niche with lesser known artist, though they could be both locals as internationals. The interviewees were the two founders of the club, responsible for all main tasks. Club 3 is another middle-sized club, also at times programming larger international artists, though not as established as club 1 and is still in the

start-up phase. It is located in Utrecht and is part of a broader organization also active in various events. The interviewee was the general manager of the club, responsible for bookings and all creative processes. Club 4 is also a relatively new club, though it has been open slightly longer than club 3 and is more established and stabilized by now. It is located in Amsterdam, with large international headliners on a more regular basis than the other clubs. The interviewee was the general director of the club, who was appointed by an investing mother company who took the initiative for the club to open.

### *Festivals*

The second category consist of three event/festival promoters, active at organizations with a festival as one of their main but not sole events. For the sake of convenience, these are called festival 1, 2 and 3, rather than event organization 1. Across the three organizations, a range is covered across three different cities and of organizations in different size or stadia. As with the first category, this group is relevant since they embody and encounter the main effects professionalization and commercialism directly.

Festival 1 is based in Rotterdam, organizing events ranging from outdoor festivals to both larger and smaller indoor events, with capacities ranging from a few hundred to several thousand visitors. The organization has been active for several years and organized multiple outdoor festival editions, though due to various circumstances is now to a certain degree experiencing difficulties. The interviewee was the founder of the organization, now mainly responsible for the creative decisions. Festival 2 is based in the Hague and operates on a comparable scope as festival 1 in terms of number of visitors. It has been active slightly shorter and is currently developing and expanding each year, with the organization also organizing different festivals. The interviewee was the part of the main team of the organization, mainly responsible for the communications. Festival 3 is an organization based in Amsterdam but operating internationally, being established and expanding by organizing editions of their festival in different countries, as well as running a record label. The interviewee is business director of the organization.

### *Artists*

The third category consists of three DJs/producers. The artists are sampled in such way that they reflected differences in years of being active, levels of popularity and (musical) styles. The sample also includes both artists who only DJ as well as two artists who also produce or have produced. As the artists on whose work the scene as a whole is built upon, their perceptions are relevant to the research topic, and they might experience professionalism and commercialism differently as an artist than a non-artist respondent from a club or event would. Also, one would



assume that the artists would be more driven by art for art's sake motives, so how their values, motives and experiences relate to the other respondents is interesting.

Artist 1 is a DJ from Rotterdam, who has been active in DJing and parties since the 1990s. He played at major festivals, both in the Netherlands as abroad, and now also organizes his own events besides DJing. Artist 2 is a DJ/producer who now lives in Rotterdam but often plays in Amsterdam and abroad. He has been active in different scenes over the past 8 years, but became more successful over the past few years, releasing music and about to start his own label. Artist 3 is a DJ based in Rotterdam who has been DJing for just several years, who has not broken through yet and can in that sense not yet live from the music. Furthermore, he is characterized by a somewhat more experimental style than the other two DJs.

### **3.5 Limitations**

This research has several limitations. First of all, as mentioned by Bryman (2012), in qualitative research it is generally difficult to replicate due to the different social settings and circumstances of the study.

The sample size also forms a limitation of this study. With a sample of 10, it is difficult to reflect the full diversity of different organizations and artists currently active in the Netherlands. And although the research has some comparative elements, as the findings of three categories are mutually compared, the sample (especially within each category) is too small to draw substantial generalizable conclusions from that.

Another notable limitation regards the specific characteristics of the sample. As mentioned, this research focuses only on the performance circuit of the industry (clubs, festivals, artists), therefore there is a limitation in drawing conclusions regarding the field of electronic music as a whole, including the circuit in of recorded music (record labels, record stores, etc.). Also, only actors active in the Netherlands are interviewed, which is sufficient for the research question but limits generalizability towards other countries – although there is a chance that the discussed issues also apply in other countries in which electronic music has grown.

Furthermore, given the aspects of social positions and competition, there may be limitations in the interviews in the aspects of a certain reluctance to share (sensitive) information and a possible tendency to provide 'desired' answers. See section 3.6 for further elaboration on these issues.

Lastly, the choice to focus on the industry and not on the audiences leaves out opportunities in relation to researching the experiences of professionalization and commercialization, though this decision is made deliberately to create a sharper focus on the industry in which the developments are seen.

### **3.6 (Ethical) issues**

Furthermore, there are also some issues that have to be considered beforehand.

An important aspect to keep in mind is the anonymity of the respondents. As the people who are interviewed for this research often make a living from their work in this field, they might have felt reluctant to share all information. After all, it is not to be overlooked that there is a certain competition and therefore competitors, which means that sharing insights might affect their business. Therefore, all respondents and/or the organizations they are part of are anonymized throughout the thesis. These issues are discussed with all respondents beforehand, in order to achieve an interview that is comfortable and clear for the respondents, in which they feel they can speak freely.

Also, taking the importance of identity and legitimacy in account, it might be that respondents would answer in a way in which they portray themselves or their organization in a way that is regarded more positive (e.g. there could be a denial in admitting to commercial decision making).

Lastly, a more personal issue is the position of the me as the researcher, being a DJ and event promoters myself. I am aware that this background has both drawbacks and benefits. Drawbacks could be that I am too much “into the matter” and assume certain things to be general knowledge, whereas those things are rather specialized knowledge about the field. Furthermore, it could lead to a less objective view. After all, some aspects affect me personally – the discussed values and motivations could very well be my own. Therefore, I aim to remain as objective as possible, and stay critical of myself, the theory and the results of the analysis. Another possible obstacle is that because I am also active as a DJ, there might be artists less willing to participate since I can be regarded as competition. However, as I am closer towards an amateur rather than an established name, I do not expect any problems here.

On the other hand, advantages were that it benefitted sampling due to more access and contacts and that it leads to more specific and focused interviews due to my insights in the field.

## **4. FINDINGS**

### **4.1 Introduction**

This section presents the main findings of the interviews that were conducted with 10 actors involved in the field. The key findings are laid out, analyzed and related to the existing theory to identify any particular correspondence or dissimilarities and to gain new insights into the subject matter.

The findings touch upon those topics directly related to the research question and relating sub-questions. Essential here are the definition of the environment and their developments, such as how it can be positioned between being scene-based and industry-based, and that the interviews indicated that these notions largely rely on the level on which is operated, as there is a certain degree of segmentation. This also had an influence on how commercialism and professionalization occurred and was experienced among the various respondents.

The structure of this section follows the order that was roughly kept during the interviews – starting out with mapping the field they operate in and their characteristics, actors and developments. After this, a focused examination on the notion of professionalization and subsequently commercialism is laid out, which is followed by an exploration of the field's values and political aspects. The preceding sections come together in an examination of how professionalization and commercialism coincide with the actors' attitudes, values and perceptions on the subject.

## 4.2 The environment, context and developments

An extensive part of the interviews revolved around mapping the field in the Netherlands, being the environment in which all actors are operating and therefore the essential context of this thesis. Since this contextual background of the field and its developments are essential in understanding professionalization and commercialism, and since this context is relatively complex, this section is relatively extensive. It covers and touches upon most of the key concepts of this thesis – which are examined in more detail in the later sections.

### *Fields of operation: scene, bubble, community, or industry?*

The way the respondents defined the environment they operated in differentiated greatly.

Most interviews found themselves part of a scene, but the geographic aspect of this scene differentiated. In some cases, particularly the smaller organizations, they regarded themselves as part of a local scene or the community of a city. This is largely due to the fact that even though cities are relatively close together, these organizations stated that their main audience was still from their own city. This is different, however, for larger organizations, which attracted also audiences from other cities or even internationally. In this aspect, it is clear that especially Amsterdam had a strong position. Due to factors as its central location and extensive infrastructure, such as record shops and clubs, it is a place where many DJs settle and where many visitors from outside of the city attend events. Also, the proximity of Schiphol paves the way for international visitors to attend larger festivals or to spend weekend trips in Amsterdam, which does not occur as often in the other cities.

Apart from identifying with a local scene, several respondents considered themselves more as part of a national scene. Especially in the niche of clubs and festivals I interviewed, it was stated that it is a scene where many people know each other, and where good relationships among organizations are upheld. However, the internet is of great importance here, which in this sense indicates characteristics of a trans-local scene, as for example mentioned by Bennett and Peterson (2004). This notion of trans-locality is especially strong if the perspective is shifted internationally. Even though there are differences between local scenes, in the end it is largely the same music that is played in clubs and festivals here as in other countries, with the same popular artist being booked.

Another aspect that defined the scene of which they felt part of, was that of musical (sub)genre. Especially DJs felt that they did not feel part of one particular scene, but that the field existed out of several different scenes, which are all revolving around a particular type of music. These different scenes of particular types of music, or 'bubbles', could have very different aesthetics, codes and audience types. The DJs I interviewed, playing music from different (sub)genres, identified with multiple genres or stated that they moved across them.

Interestingly, the clubs and festivals did not use (sub)genre as much to define their environment, though they named the musical characteristics and (sub)genres to describe themselves. This is possibly due to the fact that most festivals and clubs I interviewed programmed within relatively diverse genres, which could attract different audiences.

What was also considered essential was the 'level' at which there was operated. Smaller, more DIY organizations identified more with other smaller organizations, even though the musical profile and audiences were overlapping with that of larger clubs and festivals. This is also an aspect in which DJs are somewhat more hybrid than clubs and festivals: whereas clubs and festivals are more fixed at a certain level, DJs are more mobile over the whole spectrum and shifting between playing at a small DIY venue on one night, to playing a stage for thousands of people on the next.

When asking them to describe their environment, the term 'industry' was not often used. Most respondents related themselves to clubs, festivals around the same size and which are operating in the same niche, and therefore did not identify as much electronic dance music at large. This thus depended on the level at which it is assessed. If considering the field of electronic music as a whole, including the EDM that can be heard in the charts and on the radio, then yes, the term industry makes sense and is used, similarly to 'the music industry' to refer to production and distribution of music as a whole. However, in their own context of operation, the term industry was one they did not identify with as much. Only a few respondents used the term, which were, interestingly enough, the respondents with a more international scope.

#### *Growth and popularity in the Netherlands*

Although there are differences between cities, the general consensus is that of a certain increase in popularity and supply. Respondent 2 states:

*"I think it is only becoming more and more. More, more, more. There are only new clubs popping up. It keeps growing, it seems. It's almost as if there is no limit. At some point, places should start to get into trouble."*

And although the respondent mainly refers to Amsterdam, it is illustrative. Regarding electronic music in the Netherlands as a whole, an increasing popularity is often addressed, as well as a growth over the past few years. This of course applies to EDM, but also that was before considered 'underground', as in: more difficult to reach, to some extent under the radar, has now become more popular. This makes the term underground somewhat misplaced, which is discussed further on.

Part of this growth in what is considered the niche is explained by several interrelating

factors, of which most notably: a spillover from the popularity of mainstream dance music, a government which is relatively stimulant of dance music initiatives, a pushing force from the supply side, and the catalyzing role of social media.

Firstly, what is mentioned is a spillover effect from the popularity of mainstream dance music. Respondent 5 states:

*“Whether we like it or not, EDM of course pushes that, and worldwide people are coming into contact with electronic music because it is mixed with pop music. And then at some point you’ll automatically dig deeper at some point, and if they dig deep enough they eventually stumble into our world. So that grows along.”*

EDM has risen rapidly in the last decade, with Dutch star DJs generating substantial media coverage. What is related to this, is that dance culture is said to be almost ingrained in the Dutch culture. The Netherlands is regarded as one of the pioneering countries when it comes to electronic music, with a substantial amount of well-known organizations and DJs operating internationally. For many among the current generation of twenty-somethings, it is the music they grew up with and heard on radio and TV when they were young. However, these styles are the more part of the mainstream sound. As people get more into music, they start to develop their tastes, and according to some respondents, develop their tastes towards more niche music. Relating to this, another mentioned explanation for the spillover from mainstream dance music towards more niche or club-oriented music, is the increasing preference towards ‘authentic’ products and experiences. Here the link is sometimes made with for example a more structural phenomenon, in which (especially young) people tend to favor authentic, locally produced products like coffees and beers, as well as the emergence of the so-called experience economy.

Secondly, several respondents mentioned the favorable position of especially local governments to be a factor in the growth of clubs and festivals in the Netherlands. However, this relationship is two-sided, and governments can also undermine initiatives in their enforcement of strict rules regarding sound volumes and the environment of festivals. Yet it is often mentioned how over the more recent years, local municipalities of the larger cities are more open club music and festivals, as the nightlife and festival scene can positively influence the city’s reputation. Over the recent years, more clubs have acquired a 24-hour permit, and local governments tend to be helpful towards festival organizations in granting permits for festivals. However, this factor seems to be stagnating – especially since some local governments such as that of Amsterdam are limiting the amount of festivals.

Another factor that can be derived from the interviews, is that of a push from the supply side. The question remains, however, to what extent this is a ‘chicken and egg’ situation: whether

the popularity has increased because of the high supply, or whether the supply has increased because of the popularity. Yet it is often mentioned how in Netherlands, especially in Amsterdam, there is much going on with electronic music: festivals, club nights, etc., which make it more likely for young people, who are starting to participate in nightlife, to come into contact with different types of electronic music. This could also be a situation of a mutually enforcing effect. But after all, whether it is a demand-induced supply or not, a larger supply is considered a factor for the growth and popularity.

Lastly, sometimes social media was mentioned, although the extent to which it is of influence on the amount of people getting in contact with this type of music in the first place is unclear. It could, for example, also be that the events and artists mostly easier reached by those who would be interested in the first place. Regarding the prior, it is of course possible that social media facilitated the shift from more niche/underground towards more accessible: Facebook is designed in such way that as something, like an artist or an event, rises in popularity, more people get to see it. Whereas a dance party might only be known to those 'in the know' in the pre-social media era, now it is present in everyone's feed. That is, if you have friends who are into that music – the social aspect is very strong. Club 1 states: *"underground culture has changed a lot now, because something gets picked up so quickly because we are all online"*.

These various factors have to a greater and lesser extent influence on the popularity and growth of dance music in the Netherlands. The effect is that there is a lot of money involved in the scene: larger events, larger budgets and more people depending on it for their daily income. In a certain way, Amsterdam has developed in what could be called a 'dance capital', in a lesser extent similar to Berlin. The success Amsterdam Dance Event is an often-mentioned example of the level which dance music in the Netherlands has reached, in terms of growth but also in terms of professionalization (which is dealt with in section 4.3).

#### *Positioning between mainstream and underground*

The growth and popularity of what is still referred to as niche music, or sometimes as underground, logically has an impact on the balances between the notions of mainstream and underground. The term underground is starting to become rejected by people, as to some, the term is misplaced for the position the scene is in now. And although some people still use the term, many indicate that the term is by now not relevant anymore, is *"hollowed out"* (respondent 10), that the boundaries *"have faded"* (respondent 4), and that the term could be regarded as *"elitist"* (respondent 7). Respondent 2 states:

*"I think that the electronic music scene in the Netherlands in general, also the underground, has become quite 'upperground'. Also for students and stuff, it is no longer*

*the case that all students go to their student café's and bars, and clubbers go to the club. Going to the club is normal now. I think that's very characterizing, especially in the Dutch scene: going out has been normalized. You don't have real clubbers anymore, everyone goes there."*

What is underground and what not is also defined in various different ways. To some, underground means deviating from the paved roads, and in that sense being less accessible or harder to find for the general audience. This 'under the radar' notion is mentioned by various respondents, and especially linked to underground parties and the squatting communities. Furthermore, underground can also be defined as being more supply driven than demand driven. Other notions that are related to underground are being innovative, experimental, and non-commercial.

Part of the rejection of the term is that it is somewhat elitist, as it implies exclusivity and a higher artistic status. This might be enforced by the fact that the term underground is still often used as a signal for being artistic and non-commercial. However, it is said that this is misplaced in the sense that even many artists who are labelled underground, or are operating in the underground, are well-known artists with fees of thousands of euros. What could be behind this contradiction might be the distinction that can be made between underground in terms of position in the field, and underground in terms of musical styles. Both interpretations are used, though the one does not imply the other. On the contrary, the musical profile can be regarded as 'underground', in the sense that it is inaccessible, experimental music – whereas that music or the artist behind it can be commercially successful. In that sense, there is a separation between underground as label for the music and as label for the position in the field. Even when there is a shift taking place in the niche, from underground to mainstream, it does not mean that the music is itself became more accessible or 'watered down', it just meant that more people came into contact with it.

Furthermore, the term underground has become a relative concept – as within a spectrum. According to respondent 5, for example, whether he defines something depends on the context: in communication with the local government, he would use the term underground to make clear that the musical profile of his festival is distinctly different than mainstream EDM. However, when talking to peers in his scene, he would not use the term underground to describe his festival. There is always something more underground, which is constantly renewing and innovating, creating a constant shift in which things become more popular and the underground finds a new niche. This segmentation is particularly applicable to the artists in this scene, and the difference between underground and not-underground or commercial is easier to make. On one hand, an artist could be producing music by himself, for the sake of producing music, and



not focusing on anything beyond that, such as the sales or promotion of his music., to artists who are more demand-driven.

What is interesting in this discussion about underground and mainstream, is how it relates to the theory of Gert Keunen (2014). His notion of alternative mainstream, though more aimed at indie and pop music, seems to apply relatively well to what was observed in the interviews. This applies to how the field consists of both small-scale and large-scale production, and how mechanisms of distinction, usually more an aspect of the underground than of the mainstream, can be still in place, even though large-scale modes of production have emerged. The notion of alternative mainstream resonates with the interviews – the electronic music scene has outgrown the underground, yet it is not part of the mainstream: club music is still different from the EDM that is heard on the radio, and the audience exists of people who are more connected or ‘into the music’, than is the case with the mass audiences of mainstream music.

#### *From club culture to festival culture*

The so-called club culture, as mentioned in the mentioned journalistic pieces, as well as in the academic articles by McRobbie (2002) and Kühn (2015), were also discussed. However, although electronic dance music is becoming popular and there is an extensive supply of clubs, festivals and DJs, the respondents indicated that they were unsure about how strong the club culture in the Netherlands is.

To them, club culture means an extensive number of places to go to (i.e. venues and events), the presence of other infrastructure such as radio stations and record shops, but most importantly a substantial group of frequent visitors who are into the music and into clubbing, who together form a semi-cohesive community. Furthermore, other mentioned aspects include the granting of 24 hours permits and the presence of an active Night mayor, who especially in Amsterdam put the city’s club culture ‘on the map’ and was essential in the scene’s political legitimization.

According to the respondents, club culture is not that strong in the Netherlands except in Amsterdam, and to a slight extent in Rotterdam. But in general, the scenes in Rotterdam, The Hague and Utrecht were considered too small to have real club cultures. Respondent 3, operating in Utrecht, explained for example how the 24 hours culture is stronger in Amsterdam, and how clubbing works on Sundays there, whereas in Utrecht that is not the case.

*“Only in Amsterdam. There is just much more of that 24 hours culture. There it is also common to go clubbing on a Sunday. Sunday in the day, Sunday night, until Monday morning – and then still there are plenty of people in the club. We tried it on a Sunday once,*

*and then there were in total 200 people in the club, taken over the whole day. (...) People are just not really used to it.”*

However, although there might not be a strong club culture besides that within the capital, multiple respondents stressed that what was once a club culture, has shifted towards a festival culture. Especially Amsterdam is also well represented in this case, with a multitude of festivals every weekend throughout the summer season. According to respondent 4, for example, house and techno has become festival music, even for people who are not that much into clubbing. They just like the experience more of being outside, in the sun, with friends, and you can be back home at a decent time. It is like clubbing but more comfortable and accessible, attracting a wider audience which includes both the inner circle of clubbers, as well as the ‘day trip people’.

Respondent 9 summarizes it aptly:

*“I don’t know, club culture... More of a festival culture. I think we go really well in the summer. And I think that club culture is really being pushed, but we are not really clubbers as they are in Berlin. We go home on time. (...) For me, club culture is that people come to dance, and what I see a lot in Rotterdam but also in Amsterdam, is that it has become more of a society thing. We listen to the music but we don’t ourselves be carried away with it. There will sure be nights where it happens, but I feel like it’s happening more at festivals. That people at festivals are more susceptible for the power of the music.”*

This strong festival culture has several consequences. Some respondents report a growing gap between the audiences of the ‘festival scene’ and the ‘club scene’. Among visitors of festivals, there is not so much a strong subcultural audience group, as festivals are more open and public than club nights, and the people who go there are people who might as well go to the pub or any other music festivals. On the one hand, it means that as festivals are attracting larger audiences, which include also people who are less ‘into the music’ at first, this creates opportunities for clubs. After all, as these audiences come into contact with club music which is played at festivals, they are more likely to visit a nightclub at a later point in time if they get more into it – creating a possible spillover effect. But more strongly, clubs but also festivals and DJs were vocal about the negative consequences for clubs as a result of the rise in festivals.

The mentioned larger audiences at festivals mean that festivals tend to be a competitor clubs have trouble competing with. This works on several levels. Firstly, people have a finite amount of time and money to spend – so going to a festival often means compromising on time in the club. But more particularly, it is the competition as a result of larger audiences and thus larger budgets. Following the economies of scale principle, a festival with a larger capacity have

more market power, competing many clubs out of the market. The larger budgets mean they can book more headliner artists, of which the fees are rising as the large amount of festivals are often bidding against another. In this bidding war, it is difficult for clubs to compete due to smaller budgets. It is the process as described in the journalistic piece by Finlayson (2017), and is even strengthened by the fact that larger festivals can create a small monopoly on artists by making exclusivity deals with their agents. As for festivals, their income depends on one specific point in time (rather than a multitude of weekly events), they are more inclined to secure themselves by arranging exclusivity deals with well-known artists, which means that those artists cannot be booked by another organization in the same city or even in the same country within an X number of weeks before and after the event. Clubs and smaller festivals, however, are sometimes favored by DJs and their bookers, who are often willing to accept lower prices for smaller venues, for example to support the local club scene or simply because DJs sometimes prefer to play at smaller venues.

### *Effects of growth and popularity*

The mentioned growth, popularity and rise in festivals have several different implications. The ones that will be discussed here are: an increase of financial flows in the field, more competition, an inclination to book headliners and rising DJ fees. The high competition, in its turn, leads to a stronger emphasis on marketing and on higher standards.

Firstly, growth and popularity means that as there are more clubs, events and larger audiences, there is more money involved in general, although most respondents state that this is not a field 'to get rich in', especially in the niche in which most respondents are operating. It does, however, mean that there are more people in the field who are able to make their activities in the field their main source of income. It is stated that the growth and popularity has led people to start businesses in the field for financial gain, though this is generally perceived to be more of a phenomenon of more commercial and mainstream electronic music in the first place – rather than people operating in the niche with financial gain as their main purpose. Overall, the fact that more money and thus resources are flowing through the field's economy, also means that there are more resources available for mobilizing and creating professionalization. More on this, as well as on said commercialism, in later sections.

More generally speaking, the popularity of electronic music led to a relatively high demand which opened up possibilities for a high supply. This high supply, or in other words, the many events and venues, means that there is also a certain competition, as was for example mentioned in the case of the rise of festivals. This competition has several effects. First of all, respondents mentioned that programmers felt an urge to book 'headliners', well-known artists, in order to attract audiences to their events. The audiences consist generally consists of people

who are extensively into the music, who know the DJs well, and people who are somewhat less into the music but only know the artists who are more well-known. Especially in more niche clubs, respondents speak of a certain expert audience, where audiences are expert consumers with extensive knowledge of the artists and their music. Respondent 9 stated that in some circles, artists tend play “for other artists and insiders”, rather than the general audience. The problem with this, he adds, is that although these audiences largely exist of experts, not everyone is. For organizations, a differentiated audience means a balancing act: booking DJs to cater to experts, and/or booking headliners to attract the more general audience. Respondent 3 states:

*“Ideally I would only book innovative artists. That would be my ultimate dream. However, you have to sell enough tickets to keep the club alive. It comes down to a good balance, also in the case of festivals. So you book the recognizable artists to attract those people who are not that deep into the music and go and buy a ticket because they just think it’ll be good. And besides that, you put 1 or 2 names that very innovative, to show that you also want to go into that depth.”*

However, it is also mentioned this effect has gone to such an extent, i.e. that ‘superstar’ headliners are booked so regularly in the Netherland, that booking headliners is starting to lose its effect. According to respondent 7:

*“No, [booking headliners to sell tickets] is decreasing, I think. It’s not working anymore, you won’t sell tickets with Dixon anymore, those times are over. People have a bullshit detector, and are done with those top 10 names, I think”.*

It is indeed mentioned, also by other respondents, that there is a turn visible and that some leading clubs and festivals are trying to let go off the headliners and superstars. However, this is also considered a luxury, since rather than leaning on headliners to sell tickets, they rely on the strong reputation they have built – or they are festivals focusing more on a unique experience in terms of location and decoration as their unique selling point. In other words, not every club or festival could get away with not booking at least some well-known artists and still remain financially sustainable.

Another effect of higher competition is that of rising DJ fees. As mentioned earlier, the rise of festivals and larger events, with subsequent larger budgets, combined with an inclination to book headliners, can push up DJ prices. Around the more well-known artist, there is a certain ‘hype’, which is enforced by various actors in the industry, such as media outlets, bookers and

promoters (besides often the artists themselves). This superstar effect is particularly interesting, as it is for example mentioned how in earlier days, the DJ was at the same level in the hierarchy as the bar personnel. However, a mentioned positive aspect of rising DJ fees is that it opens up possibilities for upcoming artists: although they are not compensated as much, and thus have more difficulty to fulltime devote themselves to music, the high DJ fees of headliners mean that many organizations are looking for talented yet 'affordable' DJs.

Perhaps the most relevant effect of the growth and popularity to this research, is that it is related to high standards in the scene. On one hand, this is partly due to the extent to which the audiences can be regarded as expert consumers. This is in terms of the music, but maybe even more so in regard to the clubbing or festival experience as a whole: the general public has extensive experience of going to clubs and festivals, so they have certain expectations. The factor that enforces this is, again, the competition in the Netherlands: there are many organizations and events, so a strong competition implies that if a competitor raises the bar, the others have to follow. The positive effect of this is that events are generally of high quality, but on the other hand competition can be so hard, that the entry-barriers become too high. According to some respondents, this can even go thus far that they speak of destructive competition (in Dutch: '*kapotconcurreren*'), as this competition puts the bar too high for some organizations with limited resources, or just leaves very little room for mistakes. This high standard, which is also related to government regulations and laws, is considered the main driver of professionalization, which is discussed in the next section.

Lastly, this competition, in combination with the advent of social media, has changed the marketing aspect drastically. Respondent 8, who has been active in the field since the 1990s, strikingly exemplifies that:

*"Back then, I still remember it, that [...] told me that made put a poster for a party and nailed it to a tree at Stadhuisplein. That was 1 large poster, on 1 tree. And then the party would be packed. And that's the difference with how it is now, now you need an extensive social media campaign, online and offline – you have to put a lot of work into it to attract people."*

This inclination to focus on marketing is further discussed in the section regarding commercialism. Among DJs, the competition leads to a need to develop self-promotion skills, by networking and acquiring the right social contacts, but is also increasingly important to be skilled in social media. In that sense, the 'package of required skills' has changed. Being good at self-promotion has always been important in the form of word of mouth and social connections,

but is now expanded by knowledge of how to use social media to attract a following.

The bottom line of this section is the following: organizations and DJs are operating among various layers in different spectrum, from niche (or: underground) to more large-scale or mainstream. The growth and popularity of the field in the Netherlands have caused a competition, and effects include various developments such as rising DJ prices and high standards.

Regarding these developments, it is interesting to relate this back to the theory of Lena and Peterson (2009) which was discussed in the theoretical framework, in which genre forms and were examined as stadia. In that research, the genres of house and techno were indicated to be scene-based. However, from the interviews conducted for this thesis, it can be said that this does not represent the field of electronic music in the Netherlands today. This might be because it is an umbrella term, under which multiple genres can be included, but it is more than that: there is a strong segmentation on the basis of scope, geographical location and level of operating. Within the same genre even, such as house, there are large-scale companies, representing many the characteristics of the industry-based genre, as it is mentioned by Lena and Peterson (2009). However, within that same genre, there are niches, which fit in their explanation of the scene-based genre, or even in the avant-garde genre. Concluding on this, most adequate would be to regard the electronic music field as a whole as an industry, yet to recognize the strong and important presence of avant-garde and scene-based niches.

### **4.3 The manifestation of professionalization**

As mentioned in the previous section, the field in the Netherlands is characterized by a high number of competitors and high standards, of which the latter is partly due to this strong competition and partly due to experienced consumers. This high standard is, as the interviews indicated, directly related to professionalization of the scene. This section aims at plotting an overview of different interpretations on the notion of professionalization and in which ways this professionalization occurs in practice.

#### *Interpretations and indicators of professionalization*

Being professional as an organization or artist, or the process of professionalization, was interpreted in different ways. To some, it means being able to earn your main income from it, in the sense of doing it 'as your profession'. However, most respondents interpreted professionalism not with money, but by notions such as vision, responsibility and an emphasis on quality and service. Subsequently, the following list of indicators could be formed:

1. Full-time occupation and constituting their main income
2. Hospitality
3. Quality: eye for detail and vision
4. Financial autonomy and responsibility
5. Responsibility in terms of safety
6. Efficient organizational structure
7. Strong communication with colleagues and partners
8. Semi-specific education (to less extent)

These factors were mentioned of indicators of what could imply professionalism among artists, organizations and the people within those organizations. There are also factors, however, which are also relevant but more in an external sense, such as that of laws and regulations. These indicators are imposed by (local) governments and therefore no strong indicators of professionalization among actors themselves.

#### *The occurrence of professionalization*

Having determined various indicators, it can be examined how this professionalization manifests itself. Most respondents agreed that, especially in the Netherlands, the field is professionalized. How this occurs can roughly be divided into two categories: frontstage professionalization and backstage professionalization.

Frontstage professionalization is what is observable to the outside: towards audiences at the events or in the club. This can for example be by great attention for detail and quality for example in the sound system and decoration, but also in making sure there are enough clean

toilets and sufficient bars, and the implementation of an effective marketing plan, for example on social media. These are the factors on which depends how the organization is perceived externally, and it also includes artwork, identity, and embodying one's mission and vision. But, as mentioned by some respondents, an organization can seem thoroughly professionalized in their frontstage, i.e. what can be observed from the outside by audiences, while at the same time being irresponsible in their risk taking, or not communicating professionally with others in organizing their events – factors relating to backstage professionalization.

Backstage professionalization is where the indicators of professionalization are most clearly observed. Aspects such as hospitality were frequently stressed, for example to have adequate artists handlers and stage managers for the artists, which according to many respondents is particularly strong in the Netherlands, when compared to other countries. Also the business-to-business attitude is stressed – the way one communicates and deals with partners, but also within the organization among colleagues. This is not to be understood as formalization, per se. After all, respondents especially stressed informality in most organizations, especially the smaller ones. But even though these organizations know an informal business culture and flat hierarchy, there are usually very clearly divided tasks. Respondent 6, for example, first mentions:

*“It is still a chaos at our office. We are all over the place, and chill, and shout, and listen to music, and we drink in office on Tuesdays. But on the other hand, you know, we all have our responsibilities, and those serious things don't happen by themselves”*

He later further explains, that even though the business culture is informal and all employees are on the same hierarchical level, everyone has very distinct and specialized tasks, and there is a lot of autonomy and trust in the execution of those tasks.

However, the difficulty in this aspect is the great variety of organizations in the field. As there are both large-scale and small-scale players, business structure logically differ as well. Respondent 10 mentions, for example, that he sees it as a top layer of organizations with a very professional way of operating, and that there are a lot of smaller organizations who are more “messaging around” – although others mentioned that even those smaller players are in many ways very serious and professional as well, as they have to meet high standards and work while working within tight budgets. Larger organizations are more structured and know more specialized tasks, although even in larger organizations, there is usually still a very informal business culture. In this sense, professionalization is also indicated by “having the right people on the right spot”, as in effective human resource management. This enables an organization to utilize the full capacity of the organization and is of importance for the organizations output but



also financial sustainability.

Relating to this is also the notion of financial autonomy and responsibility. Respondent 7 illustrates this clearly:

*“But I also know organizations that make irresponsible expenses on front, just in order to display their professionalization, but who in fact can’t justify it in their business case - and because of that structurally get into financial difficulties. Or they misjudge the market or their pricing strategy.... Well, then you’re also not very professional, even though you have luxurious toilets and short queues.”*

Especially in positions where one’s decision making can be determining the success or sustainability of the organization as a whole, it is stressed that is regarded as unprofessional to take unnecessarily large risks. This is a relative thing, however, and calls for a balance. After all, breaks are said to be quite high, and high costs are involved, meaning that the risk of turning losses at a festival or at a club night are relatively large.

Furthermore, several respondents had an education that was specific or semi-specific to what they do in the field. Respondent 6 is still astonished by this:

*“It’s all just very professional I think. And in the Netherlands... I had an education on how to throw parties, you know. I study that and I get a diploma for it. I mean.... What the fuck.”*

However, even though there were some instances of respondents who had a related education, usually they were not specifically educated for working in this field in a formal way. The optimal preparation, to many, is to just be active in the field. The level of education is interesting to mention, on the other hand. Even though the respondents had various educational backgrounds, they were generally higher educated. It is not uncommon in the field to have an academic background, for example, and to later decide to ‘follow their passion’ and work in electronic music. The fact that many of them started as a hobby which later evolved into something more extensive, can be an explanation for this. After all, most respondents indicated aspects of having a strong passion and knowing the right people is more essential in success in this field, than a specialized formal education is.

Among DJs, professionalization is a somewhat different matter, but also here the distinction between frontstage and backstage are indicated by the answers of the respondents. For example, it is mentioned that part of the DJ being professional lies in how he or she behaves before, during and after his set, especially in communication with the artist handler and other

staff. That the DJ is on time, not intoxicated, and can be relied upon by the organization.

Respondent 2 states:

*“If a DJ plays, that is in principle his job. So when a DJ can communicate normally, asks things normally and acts normally, you know, then you are being professional. But you do have artists who see it as a joke, who are not professional at all. (...) They get fucked up and stuff, drugs, alcohol. Or they think they are kings and can get away with anything.”*

Although, later mentioned, the latter seems not to occur very often. Other aspects of backstage professionalization of DJs can be very similar to those mentioned earlier, such as financial autonomy and responsible decisions.

What seems essential for the professional DJ is also his or her frontstage professionalization. After all, as mentioned by respondent 9, the DJ is a performer, and although he performs an art – he also performs in service of the audience. The latter is related to the service ideal element, but according to some respondents (especially among DJs) this is sometimes lacking in the field. Respondent 9 states that DJs too often seem to play what they like themselves rather than for ‘pleasing the crowd’. This is interesting, however, as this can be regarded both professional and unprofessional, depending on the perspective and which indicators of professionalism are taken into account: what is unprofessional to one due to lack of regard for the service ideal, can be praised by the other for being (artistically) autonomous.

### *Theory on professionalism*

Many of the indicators mentioned in the interviews were also discussed in the existing theory in chapter 2. Especially the hospitality and quality are fitting – they can be directly related to the ‘service ideal’ which is mentioned in most theories on professionalization, such as that by Wilensky (1964). Furthermore, Wilensky’s elements of ‘the creation of the fulltime occupation’ and ‘the formation of a code of ethics towards colleagues and clients’ is also relevant: such indicators were also mentioned in the interviews, though in somewhat different wording (e.g. responsible, honest and clear communication with colleagues, rather than what Wilensky referred to as ethics). Also the formal education has been mentioned, which was also one that was mentioned by Wilensky (1964).

The large overlaps with the characteristics mentioned by Hall (1968), though some more can be noted, such as the organization as main reference, a belief in self-control and control by colleagues, and lastly autonomy. All those characteristics were to some extent also mentioned in the interviews: the self-control and control by colleagues relates to what was mentioned about responsibility and quality and autonomy was mentioned as financial autonomy, as well as taking

the autonomy to follow their own mission and stick to that. Hall also mentions bureaucratization, but this is less applicable. Part of the Hall's characteristics coincide, but in other aspects, the opposite was found. Found aspects of bureaucratization were a division of labor and a focus on technical competence, although this also differentiated greatly among various organizations. Other aspects mentioned by Hall, such as a strong hierarchy and authoritarian structures, were the opposite of what was found in the interviews – all respondents mentioned flat hierarchies or horizontal structures in their organization. Lastly, on the presence of rules and strict procedural organizations, these aspects of bureaucratization are in fact present, though not mentioned by the respondents as what they deemed indicators of professionalism. They were mostly imposed by governmental regulations such as that of noise levels and safety measures.

Although the theories of Wilensky and Hall do apply, the theoretical framework suggested that the notion of professionalism has changed, and that some things have shifted. The notion of new professionalism, as discussed by Evans (2008) and Evetts (2003; 2009; 2014), entailed several characteristics that could also be observed in the interviews. First of all, it is mentioned by Evans that professionalism is largely a matter of attitudes and behaviors, which largely resonated with the interviews. After all, respondents often mentioned that professionalism mainly lies in the way of approaching things and how you interact with the audience, artists and other people you work with. Another aspect of new professionalism that was mentioned by Evans is that of status, which also occurred in the interviews, as respondent 10 for example illustrates in the case of DJs:

*There will also be people who are content with where they are, and just enjoy playing somewhere every now and then, and that's it. I think that for many people, there are more incentives involved. As in, a status thing, like "I played there", or... Well."*

This most strongly seems to apply to DJs, but status was also mentioned in regard to organizations, as some respondents indicated the relevance of regarded as 'cool' by peers in the field, as in having social/cultural capital and status.

Lastly Evetts (2009) indicated that new professionalism also relates to a widening scope, in the sense that there are wider imperatives to be dealt with: on one hand to fulfil the service ideal (offer the best quality to clients), yet on the other hand to achieve this within limited financial controls, with commercialized professionalism as a result. In the interviews, this was a key aspect. It resonated with the mentioned indicators of financial responsibility, in the sense that professionalism entails that the organization or DJ is able to sustain their business by making the right decisions and not taking irresponsibly large risks. In practice, this can for

example lead to the mentioned balancing of program between headliners and upcoming artists, to secure a certain number of visitors.

Although some elements of new professionalism were not indicated, such as standardization of work practices, generally speaking the notion of new professionalism does apply to many actors in the field.

### *Implications of professionalization*

Most respondents are quite positive about professionalization. This because the main implications of professionalism are that things are generally well-organized and of high quality. Especially when compared to events in other countries, Dutch organizations have professionalized more thoroughly, which can be observed in their hospitality, their organizational structures, and high safety measures. Furthermore, professionalization in the Netherlands also included shifting from a counterculture opposing the government (as was the case for example in squatting communities), to cooperating with the government. Also, professionalization in the Netherlands can be exemplified by the emergence of studies focused on organizing events or on electronic music production.

An additional effect is that the Netherlands has gained a certain reputation of high quality and expertise. This can be exemplified by Dutch organizations being successful abroad – not just with mainstream electronic dance music but also more in the niche. According to respondent 4:

*“But when you consider professionalization in the Netherlands, then I think there is no other country that can do it better. Look at SFX buying ID&T. Why do they do that? Because by doing so, you buy so much know-how, expertise and production knowledge.”*

According to some, professionalization can make it harder for more DIY initiatives to compete or even start something at all, since the competition is very strong and you need to meet a certain expectation and high standard. Furthermore, professionalization and institutionalization from the side of the government has caused a rise in legislations and permits which can hinder DIY initiatives as well, unless they stay under the radar and organize events illegally. This institutionalization and related governmental regulations are also said to hinder diversity and create homogeneity among festivals – as they are all organized in the same park, with the same fences, etc.. Simultaneously, although this differs in each city, the professionalization and institutionalization also means that there are possibilities and infrastructures to start-up new initiatives, and city councils can sometimes also offer support in helping with locations, funding or permits.

On the other hand, and most interestingly in this aspect, is that in this field, DIY does not necessarily imply the opposite of professionalism. There are examples of DIY initiatives which are small-scale, organized by enthusiasts who do not earn their main income with it, and operates in the niche. But simultaneously, and despite their limited resources, they do make sure to acquire a good sound system, light plan, and the people undertaking it often do this seriously and responsibly, with attention for the artist's hospitality and the everyone's safety. This particularly applies to one of the interviews clubs which tried to meet the standards of being professional, while being a DIY / illegal club.

Lastly, one of professionalization's drawbacks that was mentioned was a loss of a rawer, rougher aesthetic, and was reflected by respondent 1:

*"Well, the cliché is true. With professionalization it is challenging to not let go at cost of the roughness, of the feel, of the vibe that you have, you know. And that's something that works on one hand, and on the other doesn't"*

This aspect was mentioned more often: professionalization could make the venues and events too polished, and therefore less interesting and exciting. What is sometimes observed is that club purposely (re)create that unpolished aesthetic, which is, according to respondent 10, quite a professional thing to do: he states that in the field, professionalism can be regarded as an eye for detail, or especially no eye for detail: "to keep it somewhat raw".

#### **4.4 Commercialism: a balancing act**

According to the interviewed organizations, the fact that they operate in a competitive market, with high fees of artists and relatively low margins, make that there is a certain pressure to engage in commercial decision making. The underlying motivation is not that of profit maximization, but rather one of sustainability and cross-subsidization.

##### *Defining commercialism*

From the conducted interviews can be deducted that there are different perceptions and interpretations of what the term commercialism entails.

On one hand, there is commercialism defined in musical style. This can most clearly be illustrated by for example EDM as genre style on one hand, and experimental electronic music on the other: EDM is regarded as inherently commercial as a type of music, and experimental electronic music as non-commercial, regardless of with which motives and how it is created. This is an interesting perspective: from this point of view, the musical style makes the music commercial or non-commercial, and not the motive behind it. Another, and maybe a more logical approach, is to define commercialism by purpose, and characterize it by the motivation to make profit or status – to some extent reflected in the way music is released or events are given shape.

Although these two definitions in practice often coincide, the fact that they are both used in the field of electronic music can make the term commercial a bit muddy: musical styles can be either commercial or non-commercial, and simultaneously both commercial and non-commercial music can be made from either a commercial or non-commercial intention. To clarify this double perspective: EDM, considered as commercial music, can be made by an EDM enthusiast who happens to like the style but has no intention of selling or making profit, i.e., with no commercial motive, and conversely, someone can make experimental music in the knowledge that it will be successful in a certain niche – both examples being both commercial and non-commercial by the different definitions. Respondent 4 addresses this ambivalence in the definition of commercial:

*“But well, what is underground? Because as now ‘underground’ DJs also get paid 20.000 euros, aren’t you just a very commercial DJ then? Or do you just ask... Are you just smart and get what you ask, and why won’t you? It is all... Closer together.”*

Most of the times that commercialism was discussed during the interviews, the second definition was used: commercialism defined by financial gain as main drive or motivation, which is also congruent with how commercialism is defined in the discussed academic theory, such as that by Abbing (forthcoming), Picard (2004) and Austin et al. (2006). However, the other notion

does in some way relate to for example Bourdieu's field theory, and the phenomena is also explained by Gert Keunen (2014): the whole field, such as that of EDM, is part of the commercial sphere. And even though the modest EDM producer might not be commercially driven, he or she still operates within that commercial context.

But even when using that definition of commercialism, there is still no consensus. This is mainly because commercial and non-commercial are not used as clear-cut oppositions, but rather as relative concepts. Whether something or someone is commercial, depends on the context: a middle-sized club with a niche house and techno programming is generally not perceived as commercial in their identity and way of operating, though on the other hand, it is commercial when compared to a small, illegal club. In short, there is much ambivalence in how the term commercial is used. In the following sections, various ways in which an organization or DJ can be commercial are discussed.

#### *Commercialism in the field: the how and why*

In general, respondents agree that commercialism is present in the scene, although the general notion of being commercial is of also often rejected. As explained earlier, the more towards the niche an actor is positioned, the less commercial it generally is, comparable to how Bourdieu conceptualized this in his field theory (1993). On the other hand, many respondents state that commercialism is in fact inescapable. According to respondent 1, *"you just need money to make nice things happen"*. What this means is, commercialism can be regarded as a necessary means to achieve the resources that enable the organization to do what they what they want, and to fulfill their mission, so to say. Respondent 4, among other respondents, elaborates this inevitability of at least some commercial decisions:

*"Look, not a single club is in it to lose money. And then you can even be the most underground, friendly DIY place and throw parties for a 100 people: if you throw 10 parties and you lose 500 euros at each of them, you'll soon be done partying. That applies to you throwing parties for your friends, but that also applies to Awakenings. So everyone has to take commercial decisions."*

This inevitability to make commercial decisions is mentioned in many of the conducted interviews, and it is mentioned that only the most established actors in the scene have the reputation and status to let go of commercial decision making to some extent – if only in regard to their programming, for example. Yet also in the niche, actors can target a certain audience, and respondents wonder to which extent that would also be commercial. After all, if you know something works, than booking niche artists for an expert audience is an commercial act.

However, it is stated that within this niche, so little money is made, that commercialism is relatively low – entrepreneurs with financial gain as their main motivation are more likely to seek that in other fields of (electronic) music. It is also mentioned that the further away you move from the niche, the more commercialism is observed – although this might be a rather subjective observation from people who are themselves operating in the niche.

After all, there are negative consequences of commercialism being mentioned. Most notably, commercialism could for example lead to neutralization, as was also mentioned by Bourdieu (1993) – loss of the values behind things, loss of “soul”. These aspects are further discussed in a later section. However, some respondents mention that within the niche, the audiences are usually relatively high educated and expert consumers, so they are more likely to “see through” initiatives that are substantially driven by commercial motives.

Of particular relevance are also the drives behind commercialism. Diving into the motivations behind commercial decision making, there are several possible rationales. First is the overt ‘commercial’ motive: for private gain, which is usually financial but sometimes also related to status or power. Furthermore, what is often observed, is commercialism as a means for sustainability. The motive is not to maximize the profit for the sake of gain, but to acquire “enough” financial gain and therefore the resources to secure survival and to be able to operate in the first place. Sometimes, this occurs as a certain cross-subsidization, as was mentioned in the theory by Estelle James (2003), and mentioned by various respondents: engaging in a commercial activity as a means to also be more experimental and innovative. This cross-subsidization can occur in the form of programming headliners as a means to acquire the financial resources to also be able to program more experimental artists, but also branding and sponsorships can be a source of cross-subsidization. As mentioned in the theory, sponsorships and branding of external, corporate companies can help organizations in sustaining their business, yet it can also undermine its reputation (Abbing, forthcoming) or autonomy (McRobbie, 2002).

### *The non-profit for-profit*

An interesting aspect is that actors involved in this scene are generally for-profits. This is also the case for all clubs and festival organizations that were interviewed. However, as mentioned in the theory by Estelle James (2003), the boundary between non-profit and for-profit can be blurred, and this also applies to this field. As opposed to for example opera houses or other ‘high art’ institutions, an official non-profit status is uncommon. Interestingly, though, is that the for-profit label does not fit well either. Various initiatives, even within the used sample, organize festivals or operate a club without substantial profit at all, and depending on other jobs for their income. In that sense, the for-profit label feels misplaced. This discrepancy between being for-



profit and yet not being focused on profit is something that is observed at many organizations – be it in the sense that they do not make any profit at all, or merely make the essential commercial decisions to sustain or to cross-subsidize for non-commercial opportunities.

Respondent 1 illustrates this:

*“For us it is very difficult. As a club, we feel as if we fall in between two stools. We are not [experimental, non-profit venue]- not a foundation that focuses on such an exceptional program, and that commits to raising funds and subsidies. But at the same time... We’re just a commercial company, yet we are not a ‘normal’ commercial company as we also make decisions that are hard to justify commercially. That makes it difficult, you fall precisely in between, and we are still looking for that balance.”*

One strategy (larger) organizations sometimes apply to deal with this, is by establishing a foundation besides the main company, through which the organization can apply for subsidies for which the main company would not be eligible. However, this does not occur very often, and the activities and programming of the foundation are usually different than that of the main company, in order to be eligible for a certain subsidy in the first place.

*The commercial niche: ‘underground’ as unique selling point?*

The mentioned example in the beginning of this section mentioned that by different definitions, an artist can produce non-commercial music, yet with a commercial purpose. This phenomenon is not always obvious or clearly visible, yet some respondents mention it: performing within a niche can very well be commercial. Some people speak of a paradox, in which a non-commercial or underground identity is used as a promotion tool. In a scene in which being niche is valued, being artistic or wary of marketing methods is in fact favored by audiences. This way, being niche and perceivably non-commercial, makes one more attractive and can in that sense be regarded as commercial.

This is strongly related to status and identity. For example, among DJs, there is often a desire to be successful, yet it is essential to preserve their ‘underground’ status to be acknowledged in some more niche circles, leading them to refrain from playing hits or to overtly engage in marketing. According to respondent 9, this occurs in more niche circles:

*“... because it is about being ‘pure’ and being ‘obscure’, or about ‘quality’. And people are more afraid to be seen as a sellout. (...). Their profile, people are very active with their identity within the scene.”*

Among clubs, it can be exemplified by venues that purposely create a rough, unpolished aesthetic to form an underground identity, rather than a polished or overly tidy interior. After all, and this is mentioned in other interviews, a loss of the roughness or “edge” is seen as one of the downsides of professionalization and commercialism. Interestingly, so consciously holding on to that can either be a commercial tool, or, as respondent 4 puts it, *“to make a statement: to show that you go against that commercialism”*.

#### 4.5 The people, values and politics

The developments and characteristics of the field as discussed in previous chapters are all mainly revolving around industry structures and economic shifts. However, within the interest of this research, the impact is assessed on human beings and their subjective experiences. This section aims at providing an overview the values and political aspects of the field. During the interviews, the respondents were questioned about their drives and motivations, why they do what they do and values they deem important in that. In the theory discussed in this paper, several distinctions between different types of value were made, such as personal, social, societal and cultural values (Klamer, 2017), and values such as authenticity value and spiritual value (Throsby, 2000).

##### *Social and societal values*

During the interviews, there were several values that were either directly or indirectly mentioned frequently. Among those were freedom, togetherness, community – which were mainly addressed in relation to the values in the scene and are coinciding with Arjo Klamer's notion of social and social values – the values regarding people's interactions and relationship among people directly, and of a group or society as a whole (2017).

The reasons these values are mentioned that often are explained in several ways. First of all, it is mentioned that it has been inherently connected to the music since its early days, in the time where house and techno music emerged in minority cultures of black, gay and Latino people. Considering it was a place where they could 'be themselves', not judged and among likeminded people where they could feel safe, its emphasis on such values is well explained. Another mentioned explanation is that these music styles in a certain way changed the concept of dancing, because rather than dancing in pairs as was usual for most other genres of dancing music, people danced by themselves – and by that, with everyone. This aspect of dancing as a collective experience, moving to the same beat, could have fostered these values of togetherness and community too. Also mentioned in this aspect: the role of empathy-inducing drugs such as MDMA or XTC can be considered too.

Very strong was also the notion of self-expression, respondent 2 for example mentions:

*"I think that the most important recurring value is that you can be 'yourself' on the dancefloor. That's been the credo for years. To give an example, on Fridays you process your last file as an accountant, and Saturday and Sunday you're in your leather pants in the Berghain."*

Drawing on the all the interviews, it became clear these values were still kept in high regard, as well as notions of inclusivity – especially when comparing ‘underground’ house and techno clubs to mainstream nightlife. Respondent 3 mentions for example how clubs can still be a place where LGBT+ people can be themselves:

*“Just standing up for certain minorities, you still see that. Also just because many of those people are still not accepted by a large part of society. So I think that apparently, clubs are still needed for being the place where people can feel safe.”*

In practice this is for example strived for by respondent 2, who mentions that they actively try to achieve diversity in all aspects: in artists, in audiences, but also in the people at the door and working behind the bar. It proves that inclusivity, diversity and community are still present in people’s mindsets and actions. However, some respondents stated that there has been a demise in these aspects in the field as a, which will be discussed later.

#### *Cultural value and the transcendental good*

On the other hands, the values that can be derived from the respondent’s motivation behind their practice is slightly different – it is more about being a creative output, with the music itself as main drive, such as in the notions of cultural and personal value. But though the main drive was the music, the social element is strong there as well. Respondent 10 states in this aspect:

*“It’s a logical reaction to in some way express that enthusiasm, or to share it, and I think this is a very good way to do that. So if I bought records somewhere which make me enthusiastic, I find it cool to play that music in the weekends and create interaction with people through that music.”*

Besides the sharing aspect, other also values can be attached to the music and its experience: notions of transcendency, escapism, catharsis, but also artistic legitimacy.

The music’s ability to move people in a shared experience, sometimes even referred to as a “religious experience”, comes close to how for example Throsby (2000) defines spiritual value. Respondent 8 illustrates:

*“(…) I am looking for a moment in which the experience of the audience and the music and the setting, so all conditions of an event, create a moment for people in which space and time cease to exist, in which they sort of... well, you could call it a religious experience.”*

This can also be linked to Klamer's (2017) transcendental value, the value which lies in something beyond the personal, social and societal.

Other values by Throsby (2000) that are relevant are that of aesthetic value, symbolic value and authenticity value. This is most clearly reflected in what respondents mentioned about what they deemed important in the music: innovation, pureness, experimentation and obscurity, though some respondents note that overly striving for these values can be elitist or snobby. Furthermore, it is mentioned how artists should aim at stepping out of the usual boundaries. Also on this aspect there is no consensus: some note how both artists and programmers are too much inclined to stick to the existing conventions of (sub)genres or that specific scene, and are reluctant to deviate from what is being considered cool or credible in their environment.

With aesthetic value being relatively self-explanatory, the notions of symbolic value and authenticity value are interesting as well. What was mentioned several times, was an emphasis on the background of the music, rather than merely the sound and how it was made. To some, their field could be characterized by drive to find out who is the artist of the music and in which context it was made. However, this view was not shared by everyone, as it was for example also criticized how much African music is being played without any consideration of its context.

#### *The politics: shaping or conforming?*

Although there are values that are often mentioned to be central to the field's ethos, such as community and togetherness, other respondents argue that somewhere over the past decades, these values have faded significantly. And whereas the crowd was once diverse in sexuality, ethnicity – it is mentioned how this particular electronic dance music has become particularly something of a white, higher educated crowd. There has been progression in terms of gender equality, in which a discussion has started about the gender distributions of lineups. Furthermore, several clubs mention how they are actively attempting for measures to make the dancefloor more female-friendly, by addressing harassment on their dancefloors.

However, when it comes to ethnic diversity, various respondents stated that the scene is still lacking. This is most evidently the case in large-scale EDM, but also in more niche or underground circles. According to respondent 9, this is not out of racism, but rather because of the social circles people are in which causes a lack of contact with people "*outside of their bubble*". More concretely, he argues that people of color feel less inclined to go to certain parties, if they do not feel at home in an all-white crowd, even though the music is often originating in non-white cultures. Furthermore, he mentions that as the diversity is lacking in the organizations themselves, this is often reflected in their actions regarding booking people of color, which in its turn seep through to the crowd.

Also the notion of community is discussed. It is interesting to observe that whereas a large number of respondents mentioned community as one of the particularly strong aspects of the field, it is criticized by others. This is because it evokes connotations of “belonging to the group” in a way that also excludes people: it is a we-them rhetoric, with people part of the community and people who are not part of the community, and the idea that some people do and some people do not belong to an ‘inner circle’ is perceived as elitist by some.

This taps into the debate of inclusivity of the field, a topic which can be illustrated by the door policy dilemma. Several respondents mentioned that with having a door policy, it is difficult to find a balance. On one hand, some clubs who advocate inclusivity tend to have rather strict door policies – and people who do not fit in are denied at the door. The motivation behind this is to avert audiences that are not as open minded or open to the music, which can undermine the experiences of other visitors and limits them in extravagant expression. To some, this in fact undermines the diversity and inclusivity of the club. On the other hand, it is also mentioned that it is a necessary measure to have an inclusive atmosphere. It is somewhat paradoxical: in order to be inclusive, clubs seem to be inclined to be exclusive to a certain extent. According to respondents, the most important aspect here is to find a balance between keeping out crowds that could undermine the atmosphere, while also being beware of not undermining the diversity and inclusivity after all.

In terms of making a political statement, is mentioned how electronic music has lost much of its political and social message. However, this is particularly the case in the Netherlands, as there are examples mentioned how politics and dance music are still inseparable in other countries. It is for example mentioned how in Brazil, the music and events are used as a place to get together in advance of demonstrations, and recently a police raid in Georgian night club *Bassiani* caused uproar and lead to an extensive protest-rave in front of the parliament building in capital Tbilisi, to speak out against government oppression.

In the Netherlands, such political or social charge is not notably observed. The common explanation for this is simple: the Netherlands is too ‘comfortable’, in the sense that there is not much to rebel against. Governments are helping organizations to set up a club or organize events, so there is no need to oppose them.

On the other hand, there are mixed perspectives regarding political engagement in the Netherlands. Some mention how the audiences are not strongly politically engaged: as someone working in the field, you are expected to “*stick to the music*”, says respondent 7. He adds that this is due to the Dutch political culture of moderation. However, there is also a commercially driven component to this. Respondent 7 for example states that bookers and programmers prefer him to not be too vocal about his political perspectives on social media, as being too radical is “bad for business” – in this sense, one could speak of a neutralization.

Concluding on the overall role of politics in dance music, it is interesting to note how there seem to be two opposite perspectives. According to some, dance music has a leading role in politics, as a progressive field in which we are ahead of society at large on topics such as inclusivity and diversity. On the other hand, some respondents note that in the current political climate, the drive is not coming from within the scene but from the social developments and discussions that take place in the general public sphere. In this sense, the political aspect is not shaped by club culture, but is something that is imposed and thus needs to be conformed to. It is difficult to assess which perspective is right. It is true that many of the discussions held in the field find its origin in debates in the public sphere, though the fact that matters of inclusivity and diversity are widely discussed topics in the field do prove a strong political engagement of the actors who are active in the field.

#### **4.6 Attitudes and perceptions on professionalization and commercialism**

It was stated earlier that the field's growth and developments, related to professionalization and commercialism, are in direct relation to an increased flow of money. In the niche, however, margins remain relatively small – with high production costs, high artist fees and a limit to what can be charged for a ticket price, there are many organizations that encounter these financial challenges. The result of this is that the niche is not considered the place to 'make money', and the commercial decision making that does take place is more from motivated by striving for sustainability or cross-subsidization rather than profit maximization.

This implies that those who are active in the scene are usually motivated by intrinsic values: for the love of music, but also social and societal values play a part. Those who would be motivated extrinsically, most notably by financial gain, are inclined to find that elsewhere, such as in more mainstream EDM or pop music, according to the respondents. These earlier findings are repeated in this section because it is essential in the subjective experiences and opinions of the actors involved in this scene. After all, someone driven by commercial gain will experience processes of commercialization and professionalization differently from someone driven by the love for music or its social implications.

As became evident in previous sections, the respondents interviewed for this research can all be grouped under the latter category. However, their attitudes towards commercialism and especially professionalization were remarkably multidimensional and nuanced.

Speaking of the field's growth and popularity in general, both positive and negative attitudes are observed. Besides some attitudes towards professionalization and commercialism specially, which are discussed further on in this section, the great benefit of the field's growth is frequently mentioned to be that the music has a larger audience. This means that the music, which is the main drive for most of the actors, finds more recognition and is enjoyed by more people. Since the sharing of music is considered an important value, the larger audiences indulging in the music is indeed logically a positive component. Furthermore, the increased popularity and money flow brings about many opportunities, which is reflected in the high number of events that are held, the omnipresence of headliners on lineups, but also in high quality production.

On the other hand, there are also negative consequences being mentioned. According to respondent 6, *"it can also be at the expense of the character of those small 'families', those small communities"*. It is also stated that as the music reaches the surface of popular culture, it loses some of the edge. Respondent 8 mentions for example:

*"Back then, house parties were exotic and exciting, nowadays it is more commonplace: the culture has been embraced and therefore also commercialized, which made it more*



*accessible for many people. And that is a good thing, but at the same time also some of its exclusivity has been lost, and with that some of its attraction to a group of people”*

With the music reaching a larger audience, some values and identities are said to fade. This is for example illustrated by respondents who mentioned that there is a difference between festival crowds (a broader, general audience) and club crowds (more experts, seasoned fans).

#### *On professionalization and commercialism*

In terms of professionalization, respondents were generally positive. The main reasons for this are largely the same as those mentioned for the growth and popularity in general: an increase in professionalization is said to increase the number of generated and utilized opportunities and to increase the overall quality of undertakings in terms of programming, production and hospitality. Contrarily, this more ‘polished’ execution is mentioned to affect some of the charm, making clubbing somewhat less exciting and maybe in that sense a more neutralized experience, which also relates to what has been mentioned above.

Regarding the link between professionalism and commercialism, according to some there is a correlation between the two. The explanation for this is that both are directly related to more money flowing through the field and the contradiction towards the notion of DIY. In the theoretical framework, the corrosive and antithetical effect of commercialism on professionalism was mentioned (Hafferty & Castellani, 2011; Stanley, 1989; Strömbäck et al., 2012). If professionalism is considered as attention for the service ideal and relating emphasis on quality, then indeed, purely commercially motivated decisions would be corrosive to professionalism. However, the type and degree of commercialism observed in the interviews, i.e. commercialism to sustain or to cross-subsidize, are not of such nature that it undermines the service ideal. This is also where for example the theory by Stanley (1989) does not apply: here, commercialism is mentioned as main motivational factor, the financial returns the main driver of the work, whereas in the researched field this was not the case. However, there is still a balance to be kept, and as soon as a club or festival starts making compromises in their programming for the sake of selling tickets, its (artistic) autonomy or emphasis on quality is undermined, similarly as has been noted by Strömbäck et al. (2002).

However, being commercial is often seen as “*dirty word*”, a phenomenon that is widely observed in cultural fields, for example in the discussed theory by Abbing (forthcoming), Kubacki & Croft (2005) and most notably by Adorno and Horkheimer (1944).

In the theory it was also mentioned how commercialism challenges authenticity (Anderson, 2009; Grazian, 2003; MacLeod, 1999), which was also implied in the interviews – not necessarily in terms of the musical content, but authenticity in the experience. Furthermore, commercialism

seems to be opposed to the notion of “credibility”, which some respondents mentioned in the interviews. DJs and organizations have to be credible, for example in their programming or pricing. In that sense, credible constitutes that actions are grounded in the right motives, i.e. not commercial motives but for example artistic motives. According to respondent 1, for example, asking too much money for drinks, lockers and toilets can undermine credibility.

Even though some mentioned commercialism as a dirty word, some actors are less afraid to embrace the term. Respondent 9, for example, mentions that music is also business – you give something (as a DJ, as a promotor), so you are allowed to ask for compensation accordingly: *“If your name sells out an event and you make people happy, you’re allowed to make money with it. Making money is not a sin.”* He adds that if people have an aversion for commercialism, they tend to move more towards the niche, so people can find the “position” within a field as they prefer.

In general, the attitudes towards commercialism were very similar as those reported by Kubacki and Croft (2005): the priority of the music rather than the market, but yet recognizing that the commercial reality can be essential for sustainability. Though whereas Kubacki and Croft mention a tendency to outsource non-creative tasks, this is not observed in this field – possibly due to a DIY mindset that extends beyond the core creative activities.

#### *Influence on the socio-political ethos*

In terms of the effects on ethos respondents particularly mention that as the music is rooted in a counterculture, a safe haven for the LGBT+ community and ethnic minorities, *“these values have been intertwined”* (respondent 10) historically. However, respondent 10 adds that the whole notion has been interpreted and reappropriated differently, that it commercialized, and that it now revolves around those values in a lesser extent. The shift from underground towards the direction of the mainstream has been mentioned as a factor for political and social components to fade out or neutralize – a phenomenon also described by Bourdieu (1985). Since the music became business, there are more interests, and for example conveying a pronounced political or social statement can be ‘bad for business’, as respondent 9 stated. This adds to the neutralization of this political component, at least when it comes to radical perspectives. A political message is not inherently bad, as long as it is not too radical or divergent, although these things depend largely on specific contexts. Furthermore, it is hard to determine whether a neutralized political statement is caused by a more mainstream crowd or by other contextual variables. After all, the current position of the field in the Netherlands is mentioned to be too comfortable to form a real political counterculture in, which differs from other times or countries.

Another related topic that was discussed in the interviews was that of branding and de involvement of corporate brands, relating to dance music’s values. An example that was often discussed was of a liquor brand advertising equality and nightlife. The opinions differed

extensively: on one hand, it was perceived as exploitation of the scene and its values, whereas on the other it was praised for spreading a good message – after all, as long as the message is good, these companies do have the platform and resources to reach a larger audience. To most, it seems to come down to what that company's agenda is. It is also mentioned that these types of advertisements can benefit organizations and artists financially, giving them opportunities in that sense, but nevertheless most express a certain reluctance. It largely depends on which company it entails, especially in regard to their intentions and whether their identity is congruent with the scene and message, and on whether it is of added value. The considerations taken into account the aspect of branding correspond to what was mentioned in the theoretical framework: taken reputation into account (Abbing, forthcoming), but also how smaller companies can rely upon income through advertising and branding (McRobbie, 2002).

#### *Being for-profit and attitude towards subsidies*

As mentioned, even though commercialism as main drive is uncommon, commercial motives are unavoidable and thus commonplace. Practically all interviewed organizations were officially functioning as a for-profit organization, even though substantial profit was not necessarily being made, and the workings of some organizations are in that sense also close to non-profits. However, an interesting observation from the interviews is that it was mentioned how receiving subsidy could undermine the credibility of the organization in some cases. On the surface, this seems contradictory, as it could eliminate the need for commercial decision making. However, in the interviews was mentioned that credibility is attached to clubs who are able to sustain without outside help – which is perhaps rooted in the DIY ethos of the notion of autonomy.

Nonetheless, most respondents were outspokenly positive towards the idea of subsidy, as it creates opportunities for things that would be difficult to finance otherwise. However, receiving subsidies is difficult, and as explanation is mentioned how all electronic music is often lumped together with all electronic music as EDM by local governments.

#### *Influence on the music*

However, it has to be stated that within the niche, this neutralization is not perceived in terms of the musical content. The music has not become more accessible per se, it merely reaches a larger audience. In practice, this means that the headliners who sell most tickets are not by definition the most accessible artists, which is sometimes the case in other cultural tropes. On the contrary: rough, inaccessible techno can still fill a club or festival tent. So although the question remains whether it would still if the artist would deviate from the genre's conventions, experimental or even inaccessible music can still work very well in commercial aspect – which indicates that there is not necessarily neutralization in terms of musical content.

This might be the reason why commercial programming is not regarded as inherently negative. After all, a commercially attractive headliner can still be in line with the club's or the festival's mission statement, in the sense that they still measure up to the standards of artistic or cultural value. As long as an organization operates within their original mission and ideals, it is accepted to book "commercially" in that sense of the word. Respondent 7 stresses this, and mentions how it is fine to book an artist who "sells tickets", as long as that artist fits within the club's values, and clubs would not soon exceed that. After all, among the actors in the scene, there is a general acceptance of cross-subsidization: booking more well-known artists to create the resources and space to also book more progressive or innovative artists.

However, in the case of some large festivals this might be regarded differently. Respondent 8 mentions how larger, more commercial festivals that cater to a wider range of genres and styles tend to have a more neutralized programming, and in these cases the (artistic) values would be watered down. Nevertheless, this would not apply to smaller or more specialized, genre-specific festivals such as those within the niche. Concluding on this point, the tendency is to not regard professionalization and even commercialism as a neutralizing factor of the musical content within the field the respondents operate.

## 5. CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

### 5.1 Conclusion

With electronic club music having grown in popularity, this research aimed at assessing notions of professionalization and commercialism in the Netherlands, how these notions manifest itself and what they mean to the experiences, attitudes and values of the actors involved. Through qualitative methods and 10 in-depth interviews with various actors involved in the field, among which DJs, clubs and festival organizations, these notions were examined and compared with existing theories.

The interviews firstly mapped how the electronic music field, also the niche in which the actors were operating, has become more popular, which to a certain extent makes the term underground less applicable. However, opposed to the mainstream electronic music such as EDM, the field has not become fully mainstream either. Instead, it is positioned somewhere in the middle, which can be described as what Keunen calls the alternative mainstream: adopting some of the large-scale modes of production, while maintaining much of the distinctive small-scale mechanisms (2014). As opposed to Bourdieu placing restricted and un-restricted as polar opposites (1993), the respondents indicated a more layered approach should be opted, differentiating in a wide range of aspects.

The relative popularity implies a large demand for events and artists in the field, creating opportunities for many organizations and thus creating the current saturation or high supply in the market. Since there are many competitors and relatively experienced audiences, the standards are high in terms of programming, production and marketing. This means that when competitors raise the bar in one of these aspects, others have to adapt to that to keep up – a major force behind the professionalization the scene. Another factor driving professionalization is that of governmental rules and regulations. There is a need to comply with noise regulations, environmental regulations, safety measures, etc., which seem most challenging for smaller and more DIY initiatives.

Drawing from the interviews, professionalization occurs in various ways, but also here it must be noted that there is differentiation between a more professionalized top layer and less professionalized, smaller initiatives – although most interestingly, there are also small-scale, DIY organizations that are professionalized in their structure or operations. Professionalization can roughly be put into two categories: frontstage and backstage professionalization. Frontstage is that what is visible at the outside, and relates to the experience of the audiences, similar to what Wilensky (1964) and Hall (1968) synthesized as the service ideal or emphasis on providing a

service of high quality. Moreover, professionalization is most clearly observed backstage, where most notably hospitality, business-to-business attitudes and specialization of tasks are mentioned, which are aspects that are particularly strong in the Netherlands. Although there is specialization of tasks, there is not much evidence of substantive bureaucratization as most organizations are flat in hierarchical structure and know an informal organizational culture. The latter is in strong correspondence with the notion of 'new professionalism', drawing for example on Evetts (2003; 2009; 2014). Within organizations, professionalism often means a shift from DIY to more structural ways of operating, and the capacity to make it one's full-time occupation and main source of income, although this differs greatly among smaller organizations. Furthermore, professionalization is found to be linked to commercialism in various ways. But rather than commercialism being inherently corrosive to professionalization, the autonomy that commercialism lead to is in essence strengthening professionalism.

Also, the respondents indicated that the Netherlands has a particularly strong festival culture, with especially in Amsterdam a high density of festivals throughout the summer. These festivals generally have larger budgets which they are able and willing to spend for a headliner DJ – in a certain way pushing out smaller clubs out of the market. This effect is even strengthened by the fact that large players can make exclusivity deals, making it impossible for other organizations to book an artist in the same time period. This need to book headliners is due to an audience which partly exists of experts and party exists of audiences who are only familiar with the most well-known names, although there are indicators that the effectivity of booking headliners is declining.

Clubs and festivals indicated that because of the high competition, the high fees and the low margins of profit, they feel forced to take commercial motives into account in their decision making. However, commercialism is not to be understood as a means of profit maximalization – according to respondents, this is not common in the scene. It is rather a matter of sustainability and cross-subsidization in the sense that it provides organizations with the resources for creating and utilizing new opportunities. Clubs and festivals often balance between booking headliners to create space and resources to also book more niche artist and yet remain sustainable. Being able to run a club or festival and book only artistic, niche names is considered a position that is only sustainable if there is already a strong established reputation.

Interestingly, there are some doubts about how non-commercial even the niche players are. Practically all operating as a for-profit, even though much profit is not necessarily made, all organizations have to take commercial motives into account to at least some extent. And even organizations that are operating within a niche, can often still be regarded as commercial if taken into account that having a niche identity is commercially attractive. Some call it a paradox,

in which being niche and non-commercial becomes a promotion tool.

According to many of the respondents, the scene is professionalizing, but yet there are no large profits being made, especially in comparison to EDM. It is mostly cultural and social value that drives people and as said, commercial decisions are more made to be sustainable rather than the main drive.

Yet, how professionalization and commercialism are experienced differ extensively. In terms of professionalization, the general consensus is positive. It creates opportunities, fosters the high quality in programming and production and creates a labor market in which people can make it their fulltime source of income. Nevertheless, professionalization is said to neutralize the experience, as some of the roughness or edge is faded. This concept of neutralization, also mentioned by Bourdieu (1985), does however not take place in terms of music content, especially in the niche: the music is not artistically neutralized, and experimental techno can for example still attract full clubs and festivals.

However, in terms of political statements or the presence of a social ethos, neutralization does or did occur. According to most of my respondents, electronic dance music in the Netherlands does not feel political, as opposed to earlier times or other places. It has become too popular to be a counterculture, and to some, the circumstances in the Netherlands make that there is not much to rebel against. Some respondents also admit that there is not much left of diversity and inclusivity, the values that yet deemed central to the the field. Dance music within their niche has become something for higher educated, generally white people – though progression is being made in the sense of gender representation. The social and societal values, as borrowed from Klammer's framework (2017), are still important: they want to promote diversity, both on the dancefloor and behind a booth, where young and old, different ethnicities and people of all genders can dance together. However, there is an inclusion paradox related to the sense of community and door policies, in which a balance is needed between inclusivity and exclusivity. In order to achieve an inclusive atmosphere, an exclusive door policy is often noticed.

Concluding on the attitudes towards and experiences of commercialism in relation to the actors' values, the general tendency is to reject commercialism if it does not come from a mission with strong values, either culturally or socially. Commercially motivated decision making is accepted, as long as it coincides with the initial core values in terms of artistic integrity. Furthermore, people are generally happy that for the music it means at least one thing: that is enjoyed and shared by more people and that it creates opportunities for the music to thrive.

## 5.2 Discussion

With these findings, it can also be concluded that the theory that is laid out in the theoretical framework does in the broad sense apply to the findings. Theory on professionalization, such as that by Wilensky (1964) and Hall (1968), are somewhat dated but the theory on new professionalism covers more recent structures.

The genre developments by Lena and Peterson (2008) do apply. However, in their theory they suggest that house and techno are merely scene-based, which is a dated perspective. Instead, part of the field has moved towards industry-based, large-scale and audience-oriented. However, this does not cover the diversity that is seen in the field – as more towards the niche, there are more characteristics of trans-locally scene-based or event avant-garde forms.

Bourdieu's notion of fields (1993) needs, as Keunen also stated, some changes in order to adapt to popular music. Rather than opposite ends, the field is more of a spectrum, in which actors can move more freely than is suggested by Bourdieu, and also large-scale production can adhere to small-scale mechanisms, as what Keunen for example ascribed to his notion of alternative mainstream (2014). As for the theory on commercialism, the harder dichotomies as outlined in the framework did often turn out to be more nuanced.

The scope of this research is relatively broad and explorative, which had the advantage that the field and all relevant concepts could be fully explored. However, in hindsight it might have undermined the conciseness. Since its nature is wide and explorative, it is difficult to develop a short, captivating conclusion that is easily summarized in a few sentences. Its purpose lies more in its descriptive function, and in that sense the diverged findings help create nuance and overview of the variety of subjective experiences.

The implications of this research are therefore also hard to distinguish. Most important aspect is that the diversity among actors in the field should be taken into account, but yet that professionalism offers opportunities in terms of quality, the service ideal and autonomy, and that commercialism is too multidimensional to either reject or embrace. For policy makers, those operating in the niche or alternative mainstream should perhaps require a different approach than more commercial players. When it comes to subsidizing, or regarding smaller organizations as either for-profit or non-profit, the nuances between players should be kept in regard, as well of assessment of whether subsidizing is not distorting or creating unfair competition.

One of the main limitations of this research lies in the sample. Firstly, the sample is relatively small: considering the sample size of 10, as much differentiation in terms of scale, scope and geographical locations was strived for. However, with a sample size this small it is difficult to generalize the findings towards the field in the Netherlands as a whole. Furthermore,



it was noticed that even though it was intended to focus on the more niche or club-oriented side of the field, the sample was perhaps skewed towards personal preferences and could therefore not reflect forms that fall outside of that.

Another issue is that since this thesis also touches upon the politics of dance music and related notions of inclusivity and diversity, it is regrettable that it was not managed to achieve diversity in the sample. Although distinctively different actors were interviewed, they respondents were predominantly male and white, which could suggest that women are not as much represented in the production side of the field. Nonetheless, all interviews reflected a strong political awareness on this subject.

Further research on this subject could focus more on the commercial side of electronic music, and perhaps comparatively assessed to the niche. Also, perhaps research on one of the concepts specifically rather than a broad approach would yield more specific, in-depth findings. Furthermore, the findings of this research could possible extended towards some other countries, though future research of comparative nature could provide interesting insights in how scenes differ nationally. What also would be interesting, is research that aims to verify the developments mentioned in this paper. In that sense, a more qualitative approach would be suitable for mapping patterns in these developments. Lastly, this thesis focused on the production side of the field and how certain notions take place and are experienced by those working in it – it would be interesting to assess whether audiences share these attitudes and experiences, or whether there are other attitudes and perceptions there.

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## Appendix A: overview of the interviewees

Respondent	Category	Location	Function	Characteristics
1	Club	Rotterdam	Owner/founder	Middle sized, DIY roots, about to grow to a larger capacity
2	Club	Amsterdam	Owners/founders	Small-scale, illegal/secret, DIY structure
3	Club	Utrecht	Project manager	Middle-sized, project of larger organization, starting up
4	Club	Amsterdam	Managing director	Middle-sized, project of larger organization, stabilizing
5	Festival/ events	Rotterdam	Owner/founder	Various types of events, small- to middle sized, challenges
6	Festival/ events	The Hague	Communications manager	Various types of events, growing, stabilizing
7	Festival/ events	Amsterdam	Director general	Various types of (larger) events, internationalizing
8	DJ	Rotterdam	N/a	Active since the 1990s, DJing/events as main income
9	DJ	Rotterdam/ Amsterdam	N/a	Recent "breakthrough", DJing as main income
10	DJ	Rotterdam	N/a	Recently started, DJing not as main income

## **Appendix B: interview guide**

### Part A: Introduction

- Introduce the topic, ask for permission to record, etc.
- Introduction of the interviewee (shortly)
  - o Name, age, city
  - o Function
  - o How he/she got involved in electronic music and came in current position
  - o Education
- Introduction of the club / festival / DJ
  - o Characteristics
  - o Musical profile and Audiences
  - o Scale / growth stage
  - o Marketing techniques
  - o Motives, drives and why it started

### Part B: Contextualization – the electronic music environment

- Describing the environment / market
  - o What they consider their environment (scene or industry)
  - o Characteristics of that environment
  - o Structure and market dynamics (Saturation? Competition? Cooperation?)
  - o 'Club culture'
  - o 'Mainstream' vs. 'underground'
  - o Particular aspects of the Netherlands

### Part C: Professionalization and commercialism

- Professionalization
- About the organization:
  - o Structure
    - Formal / informal?
    - Division of labor and hierarchy
    - Specific education of employers
    - Fulltime/part-time, main source of income or not
- In general:
  - o What defines professionalism
    - Indicators

- Positioning themselves
  - In ways they are / are not professionalized
  - Link to organizational structure
- Broader: professionalization of the field of electronic music
  - Effects/implications
- Commercialization
  - Importance of income
    - Commercial aspects in decision making (booking etc.)
  - Commercialism among actors in this field in general
  - Supply driven versus demand driven
  - Identifying as for-profit or not
  - The DJ as entrepreneur
  - Role of marketing/promotion
  - Branding / collaborations with brands
    - Extent
    - Why it occurs
    - Cross-financing
    - Perceptions

#### Part D: Values and artistic legitimacy

- Further elaborating on the question what drives them:
- Values and mission
  - Important values
    - Success? Community? Equality? Artistry?
  - Values they embody in what they do in music
    - Why they do what they do
  - Shared values in the field
    - Characteristic/prominent
  - Political aspects
    - Political/social engagement in the field
    - Whether there is 'message'
- Importance of artistic legitimacy or credibility
  - To you / to others in the field
  - Acknowledgement
  - Credibility / artistically legitimate
    - Innovative? Making a statement? Fully supply-driven?



### Part E: Developments

- Encountered developments
  - Recently / over longer period
  - Compared to “early days” (if applicable)
- If not mentioned:
  - Impact of social media
  - Rise of festivals (+ coexistence with clubs)
  - Rising DJ fees
- + elaborating on those answers
  - Drives of the developments
  - Effects/implications
  - Expectation of the (near) future

### Part F: Art versus professionalism and commerce

- Impact of professionalization and/or commercialism
  - On them
  - On others in the field
- Their perception or opinion about professionalization in the field
- Their perception or opinion about commercialism in the field
  - Can art (artistic music) and commercialism coexist?
  - Reflecting on commercialism
    - Neutralization?
    - Opening possibilities?
- Influence professionalization on DIY culture
- Implications on values
  - Relate to the answers from the previous section.
- Opportunities / threats

### Part E: Closure

- Concluding question: looking back at all that is discussed, what are their thoughts about professionalization and commercialism?
- Something relevant not mentioned?
- What is important – of that what has been discussed?
- Thank you for the time, etc.