'I CREATED A SCENE BECAUSE I HAD NOTHING TO EAT'

How do underground musicians create local markets in urban music scenes and contribute to establishing independent career paths?

Student name: Joan Flores Ortega
Student number: 695431

Supervisor: Carolina Dalla Chiesa

Cultural Economics and Entrepreneurship
Erasmus School of History, Culture and Communication
Erasmus University Rotterdam

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ABSTRACT

The music industry has changed enormously in recent years. Do-it-yourself (DIY) practices offer the opportunity to democratise music production and distribution. However, the scarcity of resources typical of artists and the cultural sector makes it difficult to develop independent careers. In recent years in Spain, the musical genre known as ''urban'' has gained popularity and has seen artists leave the underground to become international superstars. In this process, independent record labels, thematic parties, clothing brands and even festivals have been created from an independent position, operating outside the traditional industry. Nevertheless, artists need to navigate a challenging market before reaching that level. The music scene developed at local levels creates the perfect conditions for proto-markets (informal and emergent systems of exchange that arise to meet those needs not covered by traditional markets). This study tries to give an answer to the following question: How do urban music artists navigate and create proto-markets in local music scenes and how do they contribute to establishing independent career paths? To provide an answer, semi-structured interviews were conducted with independent artists in the Spanish urban scene. To enrich the information obtained through these interviews, content analysis of podcasts featuring top artists was also conducted. The results of this research outline the career path of the independent artist. This career path is delimited by informal milestones that artists obtain as quality signals. The step towards professionalisation is marked by the ability to generate income outside of an underground economy. The alternative economy that emerges at a local level can be considered a proto-market where these informal milestones are achieved. In this context, collaboration is a key practice that also favours individual career development. The findings suggest that the creation and navigation of local proto-markets are essential for independent artists seeking to establish themselves in an increasingly competitive environment.

In summary, this thesis provides valuable insights into the activities and tools through which independent urban artists build their careers in Spain. As the economy shifts towards more flexible, informal, and entrepreneurial models, understanding how artists make use of alternative economies offers a critical perspective on new career paths.

KEYWORDS: Urban music, proto-markets, independent career, career development, collaboration

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1. Introduction

Urban music is a genre that, in the last decade, has gained significant importance and substantial economic impact. Its origins lie in the fusion of genres connected to marginalised groups facing challenging circumstances, such as rap, reggaeton, trap, and R&B. Nowadays, it continues incorporating new influences into its repertoire, evolving into a fluid musical genre. This evolution has been significantly facilitated by new technologies and digitalisation (Fox, 2004; Rogers, 2013). The democratisation of artistic practices now allows sectors of the population with fewer resources to produce high-quality music and distribute it globally, bringing new opportunities and challenges for the ''Long Tail'' theory (Anderson, 2006).

However, despite this democratisation, challenges persist for emerging artists. Reintermediation processes did not disrupt the existing power dynamics. Major players such as traditional record labels and digital platforms continue to retain the majority of profits. Additionally, many actions taken by the traditional industry in the development of their activities contribute to the commodification of art, in a genre where autonomy and authenticity act as alternatives for economic valuation (Hesmondhalgh, 2006).

In response to this situation, many artists opt for the DIY (Do It Yourself) approach, avoiding the agreements and contracts typical of the traditional music industry's networks and circuits of commerce. However, independent artists face significant difficulties since contemporary music production involves undertaking numerous support activities, including marketing, financing or social media management. This reflects the ongoing debates on precarity in the arts (Menger, 2001).

In Spain, institutional support for this cultural sector is limited or misaligned with the needs of the individuals participating. In such an oversaturated market and under conditions of scarce resources, it is well-known that artists employ collaboration to develop their activities (Bennett, 2018; Everts et al., 2022; Haynes & Marshall, 2018). Typically, initial efforts are made in a local market characterised by its informality. In this research, I argue that these initial markets function as proto-markets and are part of a specific music scene. Here, artists do not choose poverty for the love of art; rather, they make an investment to transform their art into their profession.

It is crucial, therefore, to examine how these local proto-markets (Smolka & Heugens, 2020) are generated and how independent artists perceive their careers and progress within them. Independent artistic activities are characterised by flexibility and informal networks making them closer to proto-markets (Toynbee, 2016) than to traditional markets.

To address this question, qualitative research was conducted, primarily based on semi-structured interviews. The sample consists of independent artists (songwriters, producers, rappers and singers) from the urban music scene from different cities in Spain. To complement this information, content analysis was also performed on interviews and podcasts featuring independent urban artists who have established themselves in the scene and whose main occupation is music.

The results provide insight into how artists divide their careers into different phases, each characterised by various informal milestones that function as quality signals for the artists. Given that much of their careers unfold within an underground economy, many of these milestones are informal. In this context, collaboration emerges not only as a practice that facilitates artistic creation but also as a means to advance through an independent career. The creation of a community becomes vitally important in this career development, as it constitutes the demand in the local proto-market. Once the community provides sufficient support, the two main activities from which artists can benefit are the sale of merchandise and the organisation of shows. These shows often take the form of parties due to the flexibility they offer and the sense of unity they promote.

Understanding these dynamics is essential for comprehending how independent artists navigate their careers within the urban music scene in Spain. By examining the informal economies and networks of independent artists, this research contributes to cultural economics by highlighting how alternative economic activities are crucial in the cultural sector (Azzellini et al., 2019; Everts et al., 2022; Scott, 2012).

2. Theoretical framework

2.1. Historical developments in the scene and the music industry

The following section sets out the context for the main themes developed throughout this research. First, a brief review of the history of hip-hop and how the urban genre can be understood from this genre. After this, the most important changes in the music industry are explained, from the traditional labels to the arrival of new platforms and the changes generated in the production and distribution processes favoured by digitalisation.

2.1.1. Development of hip hop and its relationship to urban music

Rap music puts together some of the most complex political, cultural and social issues. Its primary thematic concerns are location and identity which leads to geographic specificity. It originated in the mid-70s in New York City as part of hip-hop culture (graffiti, breakdance and rap music). After a content analysis of the lyrics, Vito (2019) found an alternative culture characterized by alternative music production ideals, favouring the rise of an underground movement. Some mainstream actors assumed it would be a short-lived fashion. However, it became accepted and embraced by major labels after its commercial viability was proved by independent entrepreneurs and labels. A few years after this, major music companies gained more and more control over the market. By 1990, most of the market is controlled by six majors: CBS, Polygram, Warner, BMG, MCA and Capitol-EMI. Nevertheless, this industry consolidation and expanded control were complicated by three different factors: local cable access, more sophisticated production equipment, and new relationships between major and independent labels (Rose, 1994). Independent labels normally sustained the emergence of new genres, investing in musical innovation. Artists becoming public 'personalities' gave rise to fads and fashions which will push art markets to flourish by commercialisation (Abbing, 2022). In 1980, with the growth of independent labels, major labels were attracted to this sector of the market. Despite the efforts of major labels, it became apparent that independent actors had a better understanding of the culture behind hip-hop and rap. The new strategy implemented by majors then was to buy the independent labels and provide them with resources and access to distribution. Eventually, commercial marketing of rap was established as a common practice which may seem contradictory to its nature of popular expression. The truth is that rap music became a multi-million-dollar industry including records, magazines, video recordings, rappers, DJs, etc. (Rose, 1994).

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How can this help us understand urban music? Hip hop is probably the origin of urban music and the values it defends have been maintained until today. The term 'urban' was coined in the late 90's in the USA. It grouped the genres that come from ghettos and suburbs including rap, soul and R&B, all of them related to sampling and the use of new music production technology. Looking at the Spanish scene, urban music serves as an umbrella term for genres characteristic of black and latino music. Different styles share a sense of protest and a feeling of non-conformism from a generation. As Yung Beef said during an interview in the 'Flowcast' (2023): 'I do not see many differences, I feel like everything comes from the same idea, suffering, marginalisation and a willingness to help with your music'. In such a rich and diverse ecosystem, advances in technology allow artists to become chameleon-like and allow them to cover a wider variety of styles (Izquierdo, 2022). In Spain, the urban music scene is highly dependent on its geography, as César Lores (A&R of Sony Music Spain) said in an interview (Sader, 2019): 'Spanish artists adapt their music to different local and international tendencies'. I believe that is one of the reasons why this genre feels fresh after more than 10 years, evolution and change is in its nature. In the new digital age, blending styles and genres has become a common strategy to reach the mainstream while looking for a distinctive and unique sound (Jones, 2021b). If one looks at the top hits within the Spanish and Latino communities, the majority of songs can be labelled under the urban music category. The genre's success within Spain is clear, 28,8% of streams belong to national songs compared to a 20,1% of American-produced songs. According to Rels B (one of the top artists of the Spanish urban scene), the reason why this scene is having such success in Spain is that: "Urban music is music made with its own filters and codes, and that has opened a huge door to the music market" (Afonso, 2019).

2.1.2. *Main changes in the music industry: setting the context*

Traditionally, the music industry presented a vertical structure where a few big labels controlled and processed the creative input from a large group of creators. These labels managed the entire production process and distributed the final output through a fragmented retail sector (Hviid et al., 2018). In this situation, labels and publishers were placed in a central role of contractual relationships by bearing risks for future rewards (Caves, 2003).

It is widely known that technological advancements have shaped the industry (Fox, 2004; Rogers, 2013). Nowadays, what could only be done in a professional studio is accessible

on a single laptop. In contrast to the 90's trend, it is not necessary to be part of a large label to reach success. As an example, Billie Eilish became a superstar with an album recorded in her house using less than 5000 euros worth of tools (Joe, 2020).

The digitalization of the music industry has been greatly influenced by the rise of online platforms, which, economically speaking, function as hybrids by both dominating and becoming a market (European Commission, 2016; Eurofund, 2018). The transformation encourages an increased concentration at the retail level and an apparent process of disintermediation. Nevertheless, despite these changes, the market share of the major labels has remained relatively constant (Hviid et al., 2018). It seems that there still exists a dependency on the traditional music industry. As signals, artists try to collect a set of milestones trying to influence intermediaries' decisions (Everts et al., 2022). Intermediaries within the traditional music industry are organized as a network (Keunen, 2014) that creates a circuit of commerce (Zelizer, 2010). Often, platforms act as monopolies, are influenced by network effects and their usefulness is tied to their market segment dominance (Azzellini et al., 2019). Nowadays, platforms hold significant power. They can impose specific regulations and dictate conditions for access, transactions, information processing or price mechanisms. In this way, platforms, and the different internet service providers are essential for the digital distribution of music (Azzellini et al., 2019).

Additionally, Spotify's extensive catalogue and the possibility that anyone can publish their music is also a challenge. Listeners might feel overwhelmed by the wide offering. As long as the algorithm pushes listeners to its conservative recommendation lists, the incentive to discover new songs or artists will be reduced (Krukowski, 2019).

All the changes experienced by the industry have shifted the focus from the traditional forms of revenue to employing artists as brands. With the introduction of 360 deals, majors can capitalize on many of the artists' revenues not related to recording. At the same time, labels and branding agencies are engaging in partnerships on new hybrid models (Klein et al., 2017; Rogers, 2013). Majors seek to shape superstars and they have fewer difficulties since they still reign the music market on social media and streaming platforms despite the hasty forecasts of a more open exchange (Klein et al., 2017). The digital era has favoured a shift towards an information economy. The value of attention as an economic resource has experienced an increase (Lanham, 2007).

In this situation, streaming services established their position in the market in parallel with a resurgence of the popularity of live music, which appears as an alternative to the diminishing revenues caused by digitalisation (Naveed et al., 2017; Young & Collins, 2010).

Despite all the advantages autonomous work offers, quality uncertainty due to the democratisation of music production (Fox, 2004) tends to increase the demand for intermediaries. They play a fundamental role in sorting artists according to their quality (Caro et al., 2020). Innovative creators and individuals able to signal their value are more likely to catch the attention of intermediaries, which could lead to broader audiences. For Greer & Doellgast (2017), digitalization leads to higher marketization and good marketization requires expertise.

Intermediaries in the cultural industries are, according to Bourdieu's ideas, pivotal figures influencing the production and consumption of symbolic goods and services (Garnham, 1986). Due to their position as mediators, they end up shaping how cultural products are produced and consumed (Hesmondhalgh, 2006). Intermediaries, who traditionally were managers, talent buyers, and agents, helped artists in navigating a competitive market (Everts, Berkers, et al., 2022). Despite some of the arguments that suggest their reduction in the digital age, research demonstrates an increase in the number and a higher diversification of cultural intermediaries. Rather than disintermediation, the digital age has highlighted the conflict between artists and intermediaries, as the latter prioritizes more customer-focus approaches (Lizé et al., 2022).

Reintermediation process and effects on gatekeeping

It is possible to consider platforms' recommendation systems as new modes of cultural intermediation. Algorithms, as human curators, influence taste and shape it, eventually. It could be understood as 'producers of culture' (Garnham, 1986). Although this replaces traditional structures, they remain as gatekeepers (as long as individuals give meaning to tracks and artists through recommendation systems). Consequently, this new horizon pushes artists and labels to consider algorithmic systems when creating their music. The aim is to obtain algorithm-friendly music (Everts et al., 2022; Morgan, 2020) that generates a greater audience impact. Nevertheless, this could raise problems related to authenticity and its credibility which is a core value within urban music. Furthermore, in order to optimize revenue, song length is being reduced. Nowadays, pop songs are more

than one minute shorter than they were two decades ago (Bemrose, 2019). Moreover, the relevance of an album release has decreased and singles are more valuable as a way to stay in the 'spotlight' (Everts et al., 2022).

Google and Facebook are two platforms responsible for around 70% of online referral traffic (World Economic Forum, 2018). They dictate the type of content that succeed, and reward publishers that do not necessarily prioritize meaningful artistic value. Through their technology standards, these intermediaries generate editorial judgments. Normally, this was a task done by media, and perhaps, since algorithms cannot hold an opinion, it is one of the reasons why video reactions in music have gained importance (McDaniel, 2021). Looking at revenue, close to 80% of mobile advertising is divided among five companies (World Economic Forum, 2018).

In the end, there is no disintermediation as such, it is more a change in the intermediaries' nature. Reintermediation consists of those organizational and geographic impacts on networks due to a shift towards electronic markets (Leyshon, 2001). It does not imply a reduction of the value chain. It can be understood as a reconfiguration of the steps and/or actors involved in industrial processes. Reintermediation also takes place in social media as a substitute for traditional channels. Independent musicians use social media to build a community. Communication between artist and fan is facilitated and allows for new strategies. Now artists also share secondary content, and it can even comprehend personal life. Social media is used as a way to collect information and formalize consumption decisions (Haynes & Marshall, 2018; Margiotta, 2012).

Reintermediation in the music industry has had two outcomes: diversification of intermediaries that are now more specialized, and the artists' absorption of humdrum tasks surrounding their creative work. It is true that a viral post can boost a song that was published by a DIY artist on YouTube. However, gatekeepers are still influencing and making decisions in their spheres.

According to Abbing (2022) an art world can be defined as all actors who influence defining the characteristics of (true) art in a specific form, genre or style. Normally, they end up organising and controlling links of the networks generated in their markets. In other words, they end up being gatekeepers. Gatekeeping refers to all activities related to controlling access to something, but it usually involves limiting access as well. Artworlds generate interconnected cooperative networks in which opinions and decisions become

attuned. The attunement of judgements is not planned (Abbing, 2022), opinions are similar because people follow each other sharing symbolic and social boundaries. The different barriers are what generate in people the feeling of belonging to a certain group or community (Anderson, 1991).

Traditional gatekeepers include curators, festival organisers, promoters, and all those intermediaries who have the authority to filter artistic products, thus shaping trends in cultural markets (Caves, 2003). The battle for attention (Lanham, 2007) is influenced by gatekeepers who provide quality information to the demand side. The abundance of information can be overwhelming, and intermediation helps consumers allocate value more accurately.

I would dare to say that there is a specific art world for urban music, perhaps today it already overlaps with that of popular music. The fact is that the network formed by this art world has, in many cases, the keys to festivals, sponsorships, promoters, etc.

Bearing this in mind, a later section will explain the concept of scenes. I see parallels between the two although scenes have a much more community focus that makes it closer to 'popular art'. In contrast, art world conceptions of 'true art' suggest that they are closer to elites and 'serious art'.

2.2. Art for art's sake: making music with limited resources

Avant-garde artists and emergent small groups are normally at the lead offering new styles or genres. They bear the risk of innovation rather than conforming to the existing mainstream offer. Underground culture, being part of the popular arts (in contrast to serious art), has always shown a widespread aversion to the market, which has propelled the creative advancement of innovation (Abbing, 2022).

The idea of art for art's sake implies that artists are focused on obtaining only artistic goals, while consumers ignore non-artistic inputs and value the artwork in its essence. This position favours the decommercialization of art. If artists ignore monetary rewards, they are intrinsically motivated to follow artistic goals (Abbing, 2022). Intrinsic motivation would move young musicians with a DIY mentality to pursue their music careers under conditions of autonomy. Even if the situation is full of precarity and uncertainty (Everts et al., 2022; McRobbie, 2016) and the line dividing work and private life blurs. This often results in instability and stress for artists as they have to confront an

irregular income and little social protection (Gill & Pratt, 2008). In urban music, especially emergent artists offer their products or services for free in exchange for exposure. In any case, this conception of art clashes with the idea of art as an activity that generates wealth. Frequently, the perception of success is measured through the ability to generate a continuous income (Eikhof & Haunschild, 2007). The dichotomy has been a constant point of discussion throughout the history of the music industry. Klein, Meier, and Powers (2017) argued that the debate, despite its different forms, is still a 'sign of popular music's acceptance as serious art'.

Within urban music values and narrative, there has been an existing contradiction between artists 'keeping it real' or not 'selling out' but also a big ambition for wealth (Bridson et al., 2017). It is a complex situation in which maintaining authenticity and earning a proper income were clashing ideas, like the art versus commerce debate proposed by Caves (2003). Fortunately for the economic health of underground artists, the idea of 'selling out' is an outdated concept. Activities such as collaborating with brands or licensing songs for advertisements have become normalised and justified (Klein et al., 2017).

2.2.1. *Alternatives to economic capital*

I consider relevant to mention as well, some concepts that would be important through the research: human, cultural, and social capital, and screening theory. For human capital, I refer to the personal skills and knowledge that can help in a production process. It is not static, people can invest in improving those attributes (education, training, experience). Increase in productivity – increase in income. Meanwhile, screening theory (Spence, 1973) states that intermediaries (also employers) need signal information about the individual's abilities in order to make a decision. This information that could relate to academic credentials or knowledge is part of cultural capital (Knight, 2014; Rosen, 1989). Akerlof's (1970) analysis of the market for ''lemons'' complements this idea by highlighting the importance of asymmetric information while making economic decisions and how signals can reduce uncertainty. Lastly, social capital is related to social connections (Knight, 2014). The main components include networks, reciprocity norms, and trust. The social capital construct underscores the importance of interpersonal connections in facilitating cooperative and collective activities (Bhandari & Yasunobu, 2009; Woolcock, 1998).

All this can affect the reputation of artists which is an important commodity while building a career. It can work as a key signal to receive support (Lingo & Tepper, 2013) in what some authors call a 'status market' where intermediaries look for achieved 'milestones' that can signal past and future success (Everts al., 2022; Smits, 2016).

2.2.2. Creative careers: characteristics of musicians' labour

Commonly, artistic careers are characterized by uncertainty. Artists face high failure risks because of the oversupply of labour and the high differentiation of products (Menger, 2001). They accept a situation of economic insecurity that allows autonomy and freedom in their work (Everts et al., 2022; Threadgold, 2018). This economic insecurity is, most of the time, the reason artists hold multiple jobs, change positions, or go through long or even unpaid hours. The multiple job-holding (Throsby & Zednik, 2010, 2011) phenomenon consists of the practice of individuals who engage in more than one job simultaneously. Usually, artists' second jobs are not art-related, but they help to support their main artistic endeavours (Alacovska, 2022). The majority of creators are experiencing this situation. They behave under the work preference model (Throsby, 1994) in which additional income (normally from a second job) is invested in their art (Abbing, 2022). Early careers in the creative industries present high levels of mobility. Creative workers often occupy various roles within their production processes (Hennekam & Bennett, 2016). Not only artists do need to perform their artistic-related activities but also a wide range of financial, marketing and networking tasks.

2.2.3. Making independent music: artists' challenges

As Abbing (2022) argues, being an artist is a conscious decision based on self-perception. Early-career artists perceive their value in different ways, depending on the perception of work as a business, as art or just as a hobby, which challenges the traditional art-commerce dichotomy (Everts et al., 2022). There exist numerous criteria to delimitate creative labour and artists (Bille, 2011) but the common conclusion among different authors is poorer labour market outcomes for artists. The social milieu inevitably influences the individual and it can reassure or dissuade that consideration about oneself. The different classifications for the specific type of artist are numerous (professional, semi-professional, self-taught, or amateur artist among others). The one that makes the difference is the category of professional artists. It is usually considered when the person has art as a primary occupation, makes a living out of it and/or has an art degree (Abbing,

2022). It is not an easily achievable situation for artists who have just started. Even more so when many of them did not receive institutional support. More than half of artists in Europe are self-taught. However, both artists with a formal academic background and those self-taught encounter barriers and forms of gatekeeping. In this context, new means of media gained importance in the last decade (Bennett, 2018).

As it was shown above, artists, or musicians of the urban scene, face a precarious situation. Emergent urban musicians need to hold multiple jobs or build a network powerful enough to finance their art. Employment being sporadic, multiple and part-time to support an unpaid artistic career (Throsby, 2012) favours informality. The concept of ''Art Worlds'' (Becker, 2008) illustrates how artists rely on networks and support systems within informal contexts. Not everything is negative, emergent musicians benefit from this informality that reaches cooperative networks combining features from entrepreneurial careers (Menger, 2001) and serves as a way to reduce costs (Daga, 2022). These types of careers that give more importance to the individual agency than to the organizational structure are aligned with the conditions of technological and organizational change (Inkson, 2006). In this context, the individual is required to be pro-active and able to adapt under ambiguous circumstances.

The emergence of the internet and online platforms has systematically transformed typically private activities into public ones (sharing music recommendations or playing covers to friends). Consumers are transformed into online users with an open window to the market (Vizcaíno-Verdú et al., 2023). Concurrently, musicians are experiencing a paradigm shift from depending solely on record companies to independent management.

2.3. The do-it-yourself approach

Do-it-yourself musicians operate in networks characterised by their informality and a strong sense of community which aims for a space of autonomous creation (Bennett, 2018; Threadgold, 2018). The responsibility does not end in writing songs and performing them. These musicians are involved in their image and media presence which can be seen as an aesthetic task: creating a unique identity. In a model based on developing the artists as if they were brands, marketing and audience research became crucial (Frenneaux, 2023). On top of this, they also carry out non-artistic/non-creative activities related to the production, distribution, and marketization of music. Additionally, sometimes they perform technical tasks such as recording or mastering their music (Everts, Hitters, et al.,

2022; Hracs, 2015). The overall pattern towards generalization and flexibility of competencies (Ellmeier, 2003) turns the artist's job into an ongoing endeavour. The DIY career can be also placed as a solution to the difficulties related to the youth labour market and their precarious positions (Bennett, 2018). This constitutes a current issue in Spain. According to the Instituto Nacional de Estadística (National Institute of Statistics), in 2022, the unemployment rate (28,9) for those under 25 years old was the highest among all European countries and almost double the average (14,6).

The new digitalised frame of the music industry has influenced the competencies and abilities developed by the younger generation of musicians (Bennett, 2018; Frenneaux, 2023; Young & Collins, 2010). The democratisation of cultural creation has favoured the dissolution of barriers between DIY practices and mainstream products (Strachan, 2007). DIY in music can be understood as a culture defending the production and distribution outside and, in many cases, against the traditional and more commercial music industry (Jones, 2021a). The DIY approach emphasizes self-sufficiency and the spaces where it takes place tend to be small scale (bedroom studios). Nevertheless, this small scale practices can be combined and create alternative music networks (Jones, 2021a). DIY practices within the creative approach of artists can be already seen as a strength in the mainstream. Superstars such as Billie Eilish or Tyler, the Creator are some worldwide known artists. Nevertheless, within the Spanish urban scene, one can also find examples like Yung Beef or Rels B, who obtained international recognition with their own means. These practices can provide the work authenticity and diversity and have shaped pop culture (Jones, 2021b). Research conducted by Arrieta (2021) on beatmakers of Splice, an online platform for beat selling, demonstrated the challenges related to differentiation in a market with millions of users. Although they recognized the need for 'substantial nuance and skill' while approaching the use of a particular platform, its logic ended up acting as an engine for individual creativity outside the platform.

Two important concepts that stand close to DIY practices are ''authenticity'' and ''autonomy''. Both are normally measured by the perceived distance from mainstream practices and, therefore, demonstrated through production-related practices (Azerrad, 2001, 9; Luvaas, 2013). Autonomy refers more specifically to the independence from the commercial and more commodified music industry (Hesmondhalgh, 1999; Luvaas, 2013). Conversely, authenticity is related to 'who the artist really is' (Luvaas, 2013), and how his or her self-sovereignty resists industry demands.

In conclusion, it is now more common for starting artists to have their skills diversified, adopting roles that were traditionally done by promoters or managers. The industry was reshaped with new divisions of labour and practices. The individual gained importance, reducing the effects of location or equipment for success. Undoubtedly, the new paradigm brought diversity and was a direct consequence of the rapid changes experienced by the industry. The problem seems to be the lack of support from official institutions in an environment overloading the individual in what Pettinger (2019, p. 113) denominates 'the mess of work and life together'.

2.3.1. Artrepreneurs in local scenes: emerging diy practices

It is possible to find a difference between DIY musicians and cultural entrepreneurs. The latter often operates under certain parameters of the industry, and even collaborates, at least partially, with labels (Everts et al., 2022). Common to various definitions of the term entrepreneurship it is possible to find ideas such as 'risk-taking', 'creativity' or 'opportunity recognition'. Additionally, the term entrepreneur is seen as a misrepresentation by artists for the importance it gives to economic dimensions (Haynes & Marshall, 2018). However, I find the definition proposed by Michael Scott (2012) very adequate: cultural entrepreneurs employ non-economic capital to produce creative products and raise awareness of intermediaries while following artistic interests.

Now, musicians can also be seen as 'artrepreneurs' (Peltz, 2006) who hold a diverse skill set encompassing artistic, commercial and technical abilities. In this framework musicians act as entrepreneurs (Haynes & Marshall, 2018), valuing both their musical skills and business knowledge. Relying solely on the idea of art for art's sake is questioned when artists are advised to develop supplementary skills to succeed. Marketing and networking skills become crucial while roles evolve into 'media-artrepreneurs' (Schwetter, 2018). 'Artrepreneurs' can be understood as individuals who assert themselves in the market without following preconceived standards (Ellmeier, 2003). However, early careers tend to be built on micro-entrepreneurialism and wageless modes of life (Alacovska, 2022).

Furthermore, besides the multiple definitions and studies surrounding creative practices, how musicians construct their professional careers remains underexplored (Lingo & Tepper, 2013).

2.4. Defining scenes

Some of the most identifiable scenes are the ones related to music. The music industry is divided into different scenes featuring their specific networks (Umney & Kretsos, 2013), but what is exactly a scene? The concept of scene refers to clusters of cultural activity without explicitly defining the boundaries that characterized them. Scenes can be differentiated by location, the type of cultural production they are based on, or even a more loosely defined activity (Straw, 2004). Scenes can also be understood as communities with excess in their production, more than the amount of information that can really be processed (Shank, 1994).

A scene can become a powerful means for social, cultural, and economic interaction. Nowadays, the knowledge needed for an artistic career is increasingly obtained through an individual's activity within a scene. Behaviours and relationships are indistinguishably professional and social in a horizontal setting where the amateur tries to reach the centre (Straw, 2004).

According to Abbing (2022) in a scene's early phase, the actors collectively generate new forms (music genre). On the one hand, artists do not just supply what is demanded and on the other, consumers do not stick to the market offer. The result is a situation of interplay in which communication plays a key role. However, this is difficulted when a scene grows and larger markets lead to two different scenarios: one of complete interaction between demand and supply with artistic innovation spill-overs throughout the group, or the creation of a restricted elite (Cowen, 2000).

Considering the aforementioned, cultural entrepreneurs or 'artrepreneurs' have to confront the problem of dispersed knowledge (Dekker, 2020). A scene provides a set of rules for a community and can be understood as innovation commons embedded in culture (Dekker, 2020).

Potts (2019) introduced the concept of innovation commons, understanding it as a framework in which innovation occurs as part of collaborative processes. It usually involves sharing knowledge and resources. This means that innovation is not only driven by individual firms or actors but by a joint effort within larger networks. Additionally, Potts argues the key role of decentralisation and participatory approaches for better development of the innovation commons.

2.4.1. Local scenes as proto-markets embedded in circuits of commerce

Genres are frequently developed within a music scene. For instance, jazz emerged from a fusion of other genres in the context of economic depression (Garofalo & Waksman, 2016). Music spread quickly as musicians were going wherever the work was. Dominant firms, as happened with rap music (Rose, 1994), did not support the innovation brought by this new genre of musicians. However, it eventually led to hybrids recorded by white sectors of the population reaching broader audiences (Phillips & Owens, 2004). Along the same line, rock and roll music evolved affected by different cultural influences. Not only that but changes in technology and cost reduction made it easier for emergent, independent artists to compete with the majors (Garofalo & Waksman, 2016). These are just a few examples that reflect the connection between music scenes and 'proto-markets' (Toynbee, 2016).

These markets (proto-markets in the process of formalisation and institutionalisation of exchange) are typically informal and emergent systems of exchange that arise in response to needs not covered by traditional market structures (Smolka & Heugens, 2020; Toynbee, 2016). Among the key characteristics of proto-markets is relatively easy to find similarities with the ideas shared along this theoretical framework. Proto-markets involve informal exchanges related to the alternative economic practices of creatives (Alacovska, 2022). They are embedded in social relations and networks and serve as the origin for the development of alternative economies characterised by their flexibility (Toynbee, 2016). Additionally, it is important to consider that these markets may resist the process of commodification since they are not purely driven by economic factors. In the end, proto-markets function as a labour market pool in which talent is recruited by the traditional industry (Negus, 1999).

To further understand the functioning of this set of interactions Zelizer's (2010) circuits of commerce appear as a convenient framework. As the author elaborates, Circuits of Commerce gives a possible answer to the question: 'Through what configurations of interpersonal relations do people carry on valued economic activities and how do they work?'. Indeed, a useful answer to clarify the scenery in our research. Circuits present a distinctive array of relations in a group that carries out economic activities collectively. Circuit members share common economic interpretations which generate distinctive forms of economic assessment, also known as monies. This causes a clear division

between the individuals belonging to the circuit and the outsiders, the first ones having some control over transactions.

Even if the definition of circuits is clear, its application in real-world scenarios can become a complex task. The characteristics of circuit members are frequently variable and hard to interpret. Even more so when the logic lying within does not follow either individual interest or general market principles.

The Spanish urban scene and its local proto-market

Within a local urban music scene, many of the stakeholders rely on informal operations to reach cost-effective productions. A great number of businesses in the independent and amateur realms of this genre are unregistered entities built over oral contracts. Although recent advancements related to entrepreneurship in Spain there are still some barriers for those looking to start their entrepreneurial journey (Arroyo-Barrigüete et al., 2023). Financial support still comes from own funds or family and friends, the bureaucracy and taxes hinder the creation of new businesses and there is a lack of entrepreneurial education (Barrachina, 2022). In simple terms, they are creative teams that are originally groups of friends looking for their place in the market. A nice example is provided by Daga (2022): 'gully rap'. It constitutes an emerging independent music industry in Mumbai. In a location characterised by poverty, crime and corruption, young musicians employ their creativity and innovation to produce, distribute and popularise their art. In this specific case, the artists are applying a modern interpretation of 'jugaad' (Indian philosophy of overcoming the system by using limited resources to improvise solutions). This circumstance might favour authenticity which is fundamental within the genre and was originally accompanied by exclusion or lack of financial resources. In the Spanish urban music scene, a good number of already established artists reached the top following an independent path, employing DIY practices and their network to reach the mainstream without the help of major labels. It follows the line of creative work built in relationality under a general aversion to the market (Banks, 2007). A prominent independent Spanish label is Mecen Entertainment S.L., created in 2018 it reached last year an annual turnover of more than 1.5 million euros. Among the artists they represent it is possible to find names like Cruz Cafuné (who in his last album collaborated with international artists such as Westside Gunn), Choclock, or Dano. It is interesting to notice that the founder of the company is also the producer of most of these artists.

In the Spanish urban music scene, amateurs, independent and emergent artists organize their activities around informal and personal relations based on non-monetary values, especially in the initial phases. The values and convictions surrounding the underground or urban seem to be employed as alternative ways for providing economic assessment. Of course, once the artist is established in the scene it seems to obtain a position of leverage within the industry. Frequently, the strategies adopted by musicians are a response to the local industry configuration (Everts & Haynes, 2021; Tarassi, 2018) which is constrained by the existing market culture. In such a fluid scene as the urban music scene with many influences, there is the possibility of breaking down the established market culture. If this happens, actors need new repertoires which, in most cases, is done by new generations (Everts et al., 2022; Lizardo & Strand, 2010). In addition, these emergent artists who provide the new cultural paradigm could eventually be the promoters of cultural proto-institutions (Smolka & Heugens, 2020).

In conclusion, throughout this theoretical framework, we have explored the characteristics and evolution of a musical genre that has been impacted by globalisation and the trend of increasingly omnivorous consumers and creators. As recent literature confirms, the music industry has undergone significant changes due to digitalisation and new technologies. Emerging artists now have new tools to transform their human, cultural and social capital into economic capital. However, this is not achieved easily. Artists still find themselves in a very precarious situation, navigating through non-economic activities and alternative lifestyles. In this new context and following a process of reintermediation, somehow paradoxically, some studies suggest that artists still believe in the industry as a means to reach a larger audience and, eventually, success. Nevertheless, considering the scene as a proto-market, in Spanish urban music, independent artists are creating an alternative independent industry. Independent record labels (La Vendicion, Mecen Ent., I Love Ribs, Cookin Soul Records) and independent festivals (Motel Fortuna Fest or Inferno Festival) are emerging. These new ventures may eventually form proto-institutions, in the face of an existing system that, on one hand, does not offer advantages to aspiring artists and, on the other hand, does not seem to be adapted to a constantly changing culture. Contemporary society seems to be pointing towards a new labour normality, where the individual is required to rely on oneself. At this point of paradigm shift in music production, it is worth asking how new artists, who

are currently making this music, organize their activities and, above all, whether the traditional industry remains necessary.

3. Methodology

3.1. Methods

Throughout the previous section the state of art regarding existing literature, and the different aspects and characteristics of the Spanish urban music scene have been described. The evolution of a music scene together with the changes on the industry has reshaped economic relations and provided new opportunities and challenges. Innovation brought cost reduction and consequently, the democratisation of music. Due to this fact, independent artists without the necessary (or at least what seemed necessary) financial strength were able to reach 'the mainstream'. Some of them, end up establishing independent labels moved by their intrinsic motivation and artistic ambitions. For studying such a complex phenomenon, the methodology of this thesis was grounded in an inductive approach, which encourages bottom-up investigation and emphasizes a contextual understanding of the questions at hand. In line with this decision, qualitative methods were selected as a means for data collection, specifically semi-structured interviews for the main body of data collection and content analysis to add more insights (Bryman, 2018).

3.2. Research design

In this context, the main research question of this study tries to consider the complexity of an originally underground music scene entering the mainstream:

- How do urban music artists navigate and create proto-markets in local music scenes and how do they contribute to establishing independent career paths?

And three additional sub-questions that I find interesting to consider regarding the topic:

- How do independent artists understand and build their career path(s)?
- How are these proto-markets created?
- What are the alternative ways of economic assessment used in these markets?

A qualitative and interpretative approach was selected to conduct this research and try to answer these questions. This type of research methodology is considered suitable when investigating new fields or theorizing relevant emerging themes (Jamshed, 2014). This decision is motivated by the fact that in music scenes and, specifically, among independent and emergent artists, many of the activities are carried out in informal settings, with tacit contracts and trust relations. Moreover, emerging artists usually live under conditions of scarcity from the perspective of market relationships. Traditional financial measurements of personal and professional success cannot capture all the information present in these processes. The qualitative approach seems to be more helpful while trying to decipher the meanings artists give to their activities, their relations, and their careers. In qualitative interviews, the main interest is placed in the interviewee's point of view. It constitutes a flexible approach in which the researcher can adjust the emphases of research based on perspectives that emerged during the interviews that were, perhaps, not originally considered (Bryman, 2018; Kvale, 2007).

3.3.   Participants and sampling

Most sampling in qualitative research revolves around the idea of purposive sampling (Bryman, 2018). By using purposive sampling, interviewees are selected strategically, excluding individuals out of the scope of the research question. The idea is that questions should give the direction of who needs to be sampled. In this research, the interest is placed on Spanish artists, who are independent (not signed with major labels), and who are creating and distributing their music within the urban scene. With purposive sampling, the main objective is to gather the most information and strongly contribute to the development of knowledge (Bryman, 2018). There are different types of purposive sampling. The one employed in this research is a typical case sampling since the sample selected constitutes an example of interest (Patton, 2001).

The criteria applied while selecting the participants consisted of them being Spanish artists of urban music and, at least, having a Spotify profile (in order to avoid only hobbyists).

The final sample was made up of 14 participants. Gender balance was aimed in the sample since it affects the careers of musicians (Berkers & Schaap, 2018). The final composition (see **Table 2**, Appendix) was 9 participants who identified as men and just 5 who

identified as women. The age ranged from 21 years old to 32 years old. Only 3 of them reported having music as their primary source of income.

3.4. Data collection

Among the qualitative methods to develop a deep understanding of a matter, interviews are one of the most common. Interviews can be semi-structured, structured or in-depth. The employment of semi-structured requires an interview guide consisting of a schematic presentation of the themes and questions that will be explored. It allows for systematic and comprehensive exploration of the respondent while maintaining a line of action (Bryman, 2018). Moreover, semi-structured interviews permit freedom to, if needed, dive deeper into interesting subjects arising from the conversation. In the end, interviewees are experts in the field, and they might delve into themes not considered in the interview guide, yet relevant to the research.

Participants were contacted directly through Instagram direct message or through email if it was included in their profiles. Of the total sample, 3 participants were included thanks to other interviewees' snowball effect. Data collection was done by recording the interviews. Allowing for later analysis of the answers given by the participants. The interviews were carried out online due to geographical limitations that required time and financial resources not available at the time the research was being conducted.

The protocol followed for the development of the semi-structured interview is the one proposed by Galletta & Cross (2013), structuring the interview into three sections. Firstly, an opening segment to establish a level of trust. Secondly, a middle segment in which the researcher shifts to questions that are more specific or explore meaningful responses in the opening section. Lastly, a concluding segment to pose theory-driven questions and offer the participant the opportunity to add additional thoughts. The questions should lead the interviewee into a consideration of the relevant variables of the research. From building his or her early narrative towards clarification and increased specificity later in the interview. To accomplish this, the first interview was conducted with a participant previously known by the researcher. This pilot interview helped to test the questions selected and make adjustments. The interview guide can be found in Appendix **Table 1**.

Moreover, information gathered from interviews was expanded by an examination of mass-media content (podcasts and online interviews) featuring prominent artists such as

Yung Beef, Kaydy Cain or Rels B. All of them have experience with traditional labels and are now part of independent labels created, in most cases, by them. Additionally, all belong to the Spanish urban music scene and are already well-established in it while maintaining an independent approach. The podcasts/interviews were also selected based on their relevance within the urban scene, the Flowcast being one of the best well-known podcasts in terms of urban music within the Spanish speaking community and GQ interviews for its international relevance in mass media. This data provides further knowledge and allows comparing similarities and differences between emergent artists and some of the superstars of the scene. The quotes extracted from this analysis can be found in the Appendix **Table 4**.

Content analysis was selected as a technique to objectively and systematically identify the characteristics conversations had during podcasts and interviews (Bryman, 2018). This was done by reading the interview transcripts, identifying relevant segments of content and applying the code(s) on ATLAS.ti software with special attention to the context in which they appeared. Online podcasts were coded manually,

3.5. Data analysis

Once all data collection was done, a thematic analysis was implemented to obtain results. The reason behind this decision is based on the fact that the creative process of these artists is frequently very individual and when it is not, it is based on informal relations. The thematic analysis was done following the six phases proposed by Blandford et al. (2016):

1) Familiarization with the existing data in theory.
2) Creation of codes in relation to the data.
3) Recognition of themes across the semi-structured interviews and content analysis.
4) Reviewing the themes and adjustments.
5) Defining final themes as results
6) Producing the final conclusions

The data was thematically analysed with the support of ATLAS.ti software. The final codes can be found in the Appendix **Table 3**.

4. Results

This section includes an analysis of the collected data. The results are divided into three main themes, adapted from the original codes for coherence and to facilitate answering the research questions. Quotes will be used to illustrate the findings and the logic behind each section. The primary theme is (4.3) Career-Making and Development and addresses the first sub-question: How do independent artists understand and build their career paths? The theme derives mainly from codes on Career Development and Tasks and skills of the independent artist, but it also includes ideas from Shows and merchandise, Collaboration/Collectivity and Building Community. This theme is closely related to the previous ones: (4.1) Market-Making and (4.2) Art-Making. The first one emerging from Shows and merchandise and Building community codes being the foundation of the local proto-market. The latter is built from Authenticity and autonomy and Collaboration/Collectivity codes. Both help answer the two remaining research sub-questions: How are these proto-markets created? And, what are the alternative ways of economic assessment used in these markets? Together, the different sub-questions allow us to answer the main research question: How do urban music artists navigate and create proto-markets in local music scenes and how do they contribute to establishing independent career paths?

The starting markets for underground artists are greatly influenced by the creation, or the relationships, established in local markets. The interactions taking place in such markets and the relationships created within resemble more a proto-market than a fully developed and traditional market. This could cause some scenes to evolve from niche local communities to more structured and robust exchanges.

Similarly, the results indicate that collaborative working environments enable artists to delegate tasks and allocate more energy and resources to the creative aspects of their jobs rather than to mundane, administrative responsibilities typical of humdrum inputs (Caves, 2003). This division of labour enhances artistic production (Becker, 2008). But, in addition to previous scholarship, I argue that collaboration also contributes to the professional growth of the independent artist. Collective work can be transformed into an individual career path. The collaborative environment offered by proto-markets is used by independent artists to progress in their careers. I intend to uncover the individual career possibilities enabled by these circumstances. Collaboration is better perceived in the early

stages of an artistic career and advancing in this career often leads to more individualisation of the artist. This would be consistent with the traditional industry efforts of shaping superstars and employing artists as brands .

The results of my thesis are further organized in 9 themes resulting from coding the interview transcripts.

4.1.   Market-making: Transforming attention into income

This section details the circumstances in which independent artists generate or participate in a market characterised by its informality and flexibility (Toynbee, 2016), the proto-markets. This kind of market initially serves as a showcase to build or secure an audience, or what many participants call their 'community'. They also function as a source of income that allows artists to sustain their activity once their community is supportive enough. In the traditional industry, deals with labels secure financing for the artist. In the case of independent artists more specifically, amateur and semi-professional, much of their economic activity does not involve contracts. Creative workers are almost forced to find their way through alternative economic practices (Alacovska, 2022). Artists try to prioritise this source of income, over others not directly related to their artistic activity, in the pursuit of professionalisation. Additionally, before starting to sell their art, initial communities provide crucial support to artists which acts as a symbolic benefit in early careers.

These proto-markets do not exclude the traditional market. On the contrary, they share a part of the scene with it. However, when the artist's reach is limited, they act as the primary market.

4.1.1. Building community: From attention to retention

The term 'community' was mentioned several times throughout the interviews. Sometimes it coincides with what is understood as an artist's public or audience, but it was described by one of the participants as follows:

> *''Building community in the sense that people are loyal to you. I consider that I have many followers, but not many of them listen to my music that frequently'' (Participant 11)*

New technologies facilitate access to a larger audience. However, artists are aware not only of the importance of reaching the audience but also of retaining it and converting passive listeners into fans. Considering the ideas proposed by Lanham (2007) related to the economics of attention, the challenge nowadays is not to attract initial listeners but to sustain that audience over time.

''If you do not have community you are dead as an artist'' (Participant 5)

Community building starts in the early stages of the artist's career and is considered a necessary step. Without a strong community that grows, an independent artist is almost condemned to never advance in their career. The artist's community can be understood as a quality signal that helps bring more listeners or open opportunities for gigs and shows. It is an ongoing process, but it seems to have more importance once the artists have developed a clear identity and started sharing their music.

''I am not focused on earning money but on creating a community''
(Participant 11)

The origin of a community typically arises at the local level of the artist. The initial listeners are often groups of close friends or acquaintances. People for whom knowing the artist is not a difficulty, people whose network is closer.

''They started listening to me in my hometown'' (Participant 9)

If the community is loyal and strong enough, it does not need a large number to offer the artist the opportunity to perform their first shows or sell some merchandise. However, the main challenge for emerging artists is to expand that community. This presents many difficulties in an oversaturated market. However, it is the only way to scale the rest of the activities and consequently, obtain a stable source of income from this market.

''Once I notice I have enough support I will consider releasing
merchandising'' (Participant 11)

Breaking the first barrier of the close circle represents a challenge but it also means progress. Many of the first listeners that participants obtained were initially interested because they knew the participant personally. This can be a double-edged sword, as it highlights the need to differentiate between the artist's and individual personal images.

Curiosity must be transformed into retention and listeners who are collaborators. In the sense that they generate quality signals to people outside the artist's network.

> *''Our first song reached the highest streams, and there is the 'get to know' factor'' (Participant 2)*

Given the current context, different social media platforms are used as essential tools in the development of a fan community. Here the image of the artists and the artistic narrative offered play a fundamental role as it serves as a way to collect information and build consumption (Haynes & Marshall, 2018; Margiotta, 2012). In this area, the participants expressed the need for knowledge regarding the different platforms (the main ones being Instagram and TikTok). Not all of them are used in the same way but all are essential for developing the artist's community. For instance, TikTok is frequently used to reach new people while Instagram tends to target audience loyalty.

> *''Depending on the platform you need to adapt the content'' (Participant 11)*

The platform SoundCloud was mentioned by 4 participants as a niche platform but useful in establishing stronger relationships between artists and fans.

> *''You feel closer to people and more unity on SoundCloud because it is more than a (music) platform, it is also a social platform where you can comment and follow the artists'' (Participant 9)*

Sometimes algorithms do not benefit these types of profiles and some participants consider paying for promotions as the only option to gain more visibility and be favoured by algorithms (Krukowski, 2019). This increases the attention participants need to put into the development of appropriate publications for their audience.

> *''I think we have reached a point in which visibility is paid for'' (Participant 2)*

In this context, several artists comment on the possibilities of gaining great exposure thanks to viral content. It is not only about generating a viral post, is also about the moment after and taking advantage of the momentum generated. The high interactivity offers the opportunity to connect with the audience more personally. One of the participants after a 'challenge' on Instagram gained hundreds of followers. After this, in

his next release, he included references to this event and the community involved, which managed to generate great visibility and attract new listeners. This type of action provides authenticity and makes the audience feel closer to the artist by generating organic participative content. However, an artist must be prepared for these situations. Not acting after generating large amounts of online traffic is considered a missed opportunity.

> *''People were crazy about that song, but I don't know… I was in a moment in my life when I was not taking it so seriously. Instead, I could have taken advantage of that situation'' (Participant 11)*

All content creation could be understood as commodification of the artist's practices, a higher product marketisation (Greer & Doellgast, 2017). However, all participants who reflected on their practices on social media platforms demonstrated how natural and organic content tended to be better received on TikTok. Indeed, in recent years music has become more algorithmic-friendly (Everts et al., 2022; Morgan, 2020). In the current context, this is expanded to the artist's personality as a whole. Due to high public exposure online, not only music is sought to be algorithmic-friendly but also any type of online publication that depends on the platform's logic for success or greater reach.

4.1.2. *Making a living in the gig: parties, shows and merchandise*

The main way to benefit from the community generated is by holding shows and creating merchandising (being shows or concerts the main pillar). Independent artists rely on these gigs to make a living and shift from non-art related jobs. The two are part of the proto-markets in which independent artists operate and develop their careers. In the traditional industry, this is done by working with specific intermediaries that are part of and have strong connections within the music industry network (Azzellini et al., 2019). In the case of emerging independent careers, these connections are non-existent or very scarce. This, together with the scarcity of resources, pushes this type of artist to rely on their closest network and self-management. Nevertheless, it does not change the difficulties artists experience due to being part of such a competitive market (Lizé et al., 2022) in a constant battle for attention (Lanham, 2007).

The sale of merchandising is perceived as a simple alternative to generate small income or cover expenses. Likewise, even when it does not generate profits, it is seen as an investment in advertising and as an opportunity to establish closer ties with the audience.

''If you do it right, it is easy money, 100%, I was working with pre-orders,
I only produced what I needed'' (Participant 3)

Performing in shows generates the largest amount of income for independent artists, this confirms how live music regains importance (Naveed et al., 2017; Young & Collins, 2010). This only happens when the community is large enough. In the first shows, most artists hardly generated any money and they performed in exchange for exposure and establishing a more consolidated position in the scene. Typically, artists begin to perform shows in their locality for the nearby community. Many of these shows are held completely independently, with the artists being the ones who pay for the venue and run the risk of raising enough to cover those expenses with ticket sales. Due to their limited financial means, many of these shows were organised collaboratively. Carrying out this type of show also allows the artist's position to expand in the proto-market that his local scene constitutes.

''I think one of the most important things for an unknown artist is to do
shows (...), you need to build an audience, if people see you live and you
do it right, you will create movement'' (Participant 9)

One of the advantages the urban scene offers over others is the ease of putting on a show. Participant 2 mentioned how, for him, a quality show can count with just a singer and a DJ. This feature facilitates coordination when organizing concerts and allows benefits to be shared among fewer people. However, from an amateur position, the informality of these markets can suppose a barrier for many artists. The participants mentioned how on many occasions the agreements with the venues did not imply contracts involved. This is another condition that pushes independent artists to organise events on their own, as it was mentioned before.

''I've waited 6 months to get paid 50 euros, it is a joke'' (Participant 6)

Collaborative shows (by this I mean shows or parties organized by several artists together, sharing stage and related expenses) are a way to share communities and join forces. These first shows are usually integrated into parties, in which several artists perform briefly throughout the night. This is seen as a more effective strategy that allows the public to enjoy the well-known music of the scene while having the opportunity to discover or support their local artists.

> *''We did a show, very important here in our city with Juicy Bae, we were*
> *opening the event for her, and at the end she is a national icon''*
> *(Participant 6)*

Established artists also mentioned organising parties as the turning point for leaving their non-art-related work. In addition to allowing income acquisition, the parties act as a space to promote the artist's music and consolidate their live performances.

> *''We started organising parties, PXXR GANG PARTY, Dani came with*
> *me and I stopped working'' (Yung Beef, 2022)*

4.2. Art making: Collaboration supporting creativity. The value of authenticity and autonomy

This section explains the circumstances in which art is produced independently and how alternative evaluations are made based on values such as authenticity. The main fact mentioned by the participants regarding the creation of their art was the importance of collaborative or collective work. In the early stages of an independent career, the scarcity of resources hinders art creation processes. Collaboration appears as a solution.

The first collaborations usually involve a friendly relationship. The values behind these collaborations act as alternatives for economic evaluation or what Zelizer (2010) calls monies. These strongly rely on cultural capital (Knight, 2014; Rosen, 1989). In this way, it is possible to make up for the lack of financial power provided by record labels in the traditional industry.

> *''Nowadays, music making for me is, between quotation marks, cost zero,*
> *because it really is a work exchange (…) I mean, my love and effort and*
> *knowledge in exchange for their love, effort and knowledge'' (Participant*
> *9)*

Deciding to pursue an independent career also offers creative autonomy. This was highly criticized by the first wave of trap artists in Spain. The pursuit for autonomy and authenticity was cited by one participant and similarly remarked upon by artists in the podcasts. As Kaydy Cain explained in his interview for GQ Spain:

> *''We signed with Sony, that was weird (…). We realised how the (traditional) industry works and that we didn't fit there''* (Kaydy Cain, 2023)

Almost all participants had problems developing their art individually or experienced improvement after teaming up with others. Since these artists often occupy different positions within their production (Hennekam & Bennett, 2016), task division allows them to invest more time in the development of artistic activity. Moreover, it is also a way to reduce information asymmetry regarding one's quality. Receiving quality signals is of great importance to encourage the production of art. When the community is very small, this is done through positive feedback from friends or doing featurings with other artists.

> *''That's something I envy from other artists, when they have that kind of union… In the end, I felt that doing more I was obtaining the same results as them.''* (Participant 5)

> *''Your local circle validation, meeting new contacts, another producer, at the end you end up with a lot of people''* (Participant 6)

Several respondents differentiated between collaborating and simply paying for a service. The first giving added value to artistic production.

> *''The guy that recorded us was working with many rappers from A Coruña, and they will often release songs featuring 10 or 12 artists''* (Participant 4)

The value of locality

In this section, it is important to mention the value that the locality and the territory can provide in the form of authenticity. In a music scene influenced by different genres and styles, relying on the unique characteristics of the area helps to differentiate and connect better with local proto-markets. In the sample of this research, territoriality was more prevalent among artists from the southern part of Spain, in the region of Andalucía. Participant 12 described his music as *''R&B utrerano''* (referring to Utrera, a town in the province of Seville) due to the musical influences of flamenco in his compositions but also because of the inevitable characteristic accent of this area. Participant 6 commented on how she decided to start her performances dancing flamenco. For her, this was a way to capture the public's attention by offering something unusual in the urban scene but at

the same time connecting with the local culture. After her introduction, the music transitions to modern rhythms. Then the artist begins to dance twerk, unifying a traditional dance with more modern practices.

Other artists, although they did not rely so much on local culture, did use common places in their localities to connect and support their neighbourhoods. Participant 4 created t-shirts for a recent release that mentions the bar he usually goes to in his city. The t-shirts show the bar's unmistakable logo and the artist with his small team sitting at a table. He reported receiving local positive feedback after this action.

> *''We spend the day in that bar, is a very well-known bar and we know the people working there'' (Participant 4)*

4.3. Career-making and development: Main changes through an independent career

Firstly, I find it necessary to mention some reflections from the interviewees regarding their career and their perception of themselves as artists. As seen in the theoretical framework, above all the difficulties and challenges these individuals face, there is no established consensus within academia to define these artists (Haynes & Marshall, 2018; Peltz, 2006; Scott, 2012). There is likely a strong relationship between this fact and the frequent doubts the interviewees have about themselves as artists. Consequently, this hinders the creation of a well-defined career path for independent artists operating in an informal context that has experienced many changes over the last decade, and in which institutional support is almost non-existent.

Throughout the interviews, participants were invited to reflect on changes over the course of their careers. Despite the difficulties in defining their position:

> *''I feel I'll be an amateur until I die'' (Participant 8)*

It was possible to identify different phases or stages in the career development of an independent artist. The predominant trend is to consider the artist, or at least the professional artist, as someone who earns a living from their art. This fact is a constant that confirms the perception of a professional artist only when art becomes the primary occupation of the individual (Abbing, 2022, p. 105). Additionally, it aligns with the

perception of success as the ability to generate a stable income (Eikhof & Haunschild, 2007).

> *''I still think I'm an amateur since it is not my profession (...) Although I've probably spent more than 10000 hours making music''* (Participant 1)

Moreover, many of the interviewees demonstrated a pessimistic outlook on achieving a stable economic position within the music industry.

> *''My parents did not tell me that, I had in mind that with music... like, I was not going to make a living out of it''* (Participant 7)

This reality is also motivated by the consequences of the reintermediation mentioned in the theory section. Despite the initial positive reactions to do-it-yourself practices and the well-known democratisation of music, many artists report feeling overwhelmed by the workload that professionalization entails. This can become a reason for demotivation during the artist's career development and, in some cases, even lead to abandoning the activity.

> *''The decision to stop was a mix between disappointment and reality check, the reality was not that you cannot make a living out of music, but that in order to do so, you have to do so many things not music related...''* (Participant 5)

> *''I can make a beat and make it sound as good as in a studio, send it to someone to do the mastering, hire people, talk to venues and organise a tour. All right, you can do it, I mean, you may have the means or tools''* (Participant 2)

Independent artists reflect on the idea that having the possibility to do something themselves does not directly translate to a real democratisation of music. When a DIY approach means being an artist, manager, marketing director and accountant, many people fail to advance.

However, before reaching a semi-professional or professional level it is worth considering the previous stages during the development of an independent music career path.

For music to stop being a hobby, there must be a clear intention. Most participants expressed experiencing a change in their perception of their career once they decided to upload their music online. This is typically related to the creation of an artist profile, first contacts with distribution services, and in many cases, feeling satisfied with their product. Whether it was in the technical aspects or regarding the sound identity they wanted to showcase to the world.

> *''It took me 4 years to feel prepared, release my own song with my own style (…) Yes, in the end, you need to develop your sound'' (Participant 1)*

Achieving one's own sound, one's musical identity, was a reflection independently reached by many interviewees with the same conclusion: this represented an advancement in their independent careers. It was not always a clearly defined process; in many cases, it was an ongoing process that organically led to the creation of a characteristic sound or artistic identity. However, in all cases, there was a turning point marked by its attainment. This point could be the creation of a profile for someone who starts uploading music to digital platforms, but it could also be the release of a specific album for profiles with a prior trajectory, even leading to cases of changing artistic names.

> *''I even changed my name, I needed it (…) and I found my sound and who I was'' (Participant 6)*

This transition towards an amateur level can also be facilitated by collaborative work. The act of sharing ideas but, above all, having the possibility to distribute tasks and delegate part of the work, allows for the employment of greater resources in more concrete tasks. Similarly, this fact allows for specialisation by participants in those specific processes, whether it be music production, imagery, marketing or distribution. Lastly, an additional factor is the responsibility that comes with not working alone and having collaborators or a collective. This translates into greater dedication and commitment to the musical project.

> *''I started with my friends, with my group of friends (…) Working together made me take music more seriously'' (Participant 8)*

These two events, which could be defined as milestones (Everts, Berkers, et al., 2022) to achieve for the development of the artist's career, are not mutually exclusive nor do they

necessarily occur in a particular order. For some interviewees, the first step was finding their unique sound, while for others, this occurred later, once they had already started working collaboratively. The path towards professionalisation seems to be flexible and fluid. A terrain where the milestones to reach the amateur level and a semi-professional one are, sometimes, interchangeable.

> *''Being an amateur for me was doing it by myself and this transition to an almost professional work came because of joining them'' (Participant 9)*

At this point, artists also mentioned the importance of performing shows and building an audience throughout the process. The audience is crucial; it's the primary goal to achieve a source of income through artistic activity and, therefore, be considered a professional artist. Typically, the first shows as an amateur involve sharing the stage with other emerging artists and usually occur at a local level or in areas close to the artist's locality. To progress in this aspect, independent artists consider filling larger venues, accessing festivals, or participating in shows with more established and well-known artists in the scene. These are milestones shared with the professional careers of artists closer to the traditional industry.

> *''By giving shows you become a real artist. Even if you have 100000 streams on Spotify… if you organise a show and no one goes there…'' (Participant 5)*

For those artists who achieve a stable source of income with their music, reinvesting in professionalizing themselves allows them to advance in their career path. This reinvestment can take different forms. Participant 8, whose primary economic activity during the research was music, explained that part of the benefits were being used to hire a sound engineer for their performances and to consolidate her online image as an artist. During this process of scalation, there is also a search for official registration to move away from the informal economy characteristic of the amateur or semi-professional.

> *''I've registered myself as a brand, here in Spain and I would like to drop more (merchandising) and create an online store'' (Participant 10)*

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However, this step towards professionalization, which goes hand in hand with a process of institutionalization, presents certain difficulties in the case of Spain. At low levels of income, the fees to be paid make this option unattractive to emergent artists or amateurs.

''Being a freelancer in Spain is ****'' (Participant 2)

This circumstance hinders the possibilities for artists to contribute and generate income officially. As Participant 2 continues to explain, many of them simply start working within the informal economy until their income level allows them to contribute. Similarly, along with working under collectives or collaboration, these may be the reasons why many individuals eventually opt to establish a small company or brand.

Participant 14 confirmed this after several years as a freelancer. For him, there are different steps and he recognizes that, with an income below 1000 euros per month, he would never recommend anyone becoming a freelancer. Finally, he added that if he managed to obtain a higher income then he would consider creating a company and hiring people.

> *''At that point, we realised we had to create La Vendición, our own record label. If people don't do that is because they don't want to or because they don't know how to, the latter was our problem'' (Yung Beef, 2023)*

I consider it important to add a reflection that coincided among those artists who had invested money. In most cases, making an economic investment in any of its forms (paying for advertisement on social media or hiring a person to outsource part of the activities) generated a feeling of progress. This action made artists take their careers more seriously to reduce risks in terms of losing the investment.

> *'If you put money, you make sure that it is worth it' (Participant 8)*

Being a woman in the scene

The women who participated in this research showed that the urban music scene facilitated the inclusion of the female voice in underground music. Unlike reggaeton or hip-hop, the participants indicated that urban music offers a more open musical genre with fewer prejudices that allow women to talk about topics that, in other musical genres, would be taboo, such as sex.

''It is a category that encompasses more things (…) it offers you another philosophy'' (Participant 6)

However, although the participants did not identify major barriers to entry in networks, they do sometimes perceive different treatment by other actors in the scene. Urban music seems to offer a more open space, but there is still a lack of visibility. Usually, the big festivals still have a high percentage of male artists.

5. Discussion

In the discussion section, once the results have been presented and analysed, the findings obtained during this research are presented. In the same way, the main research question of this thesis is answered:

- How do underground musicians create proto-markets in local music scenes and contribute to establishing independent career paths? How do independent artists understand and build this career path?

Independent artists in the Spanish urban music scene generate communities based on values such as cultural authenticity and the autonomy that artistic independence offers. In the early phases of an artist's career, community and local collaborations are essential to obtain the initial milestones that can motivate the artists to continue their work thanks to signals regarding the artist's quality. Due to the lack of institutional support and the circumstances and characteristics of the sector in Spain, artists obtain their first economic income in the context of an informal/underground economy. This fact affects their perception of themselves as professional artists. The fundamental pillar around which these proto-markets revolve is the organisation of shows that, in many cases, take the form of parties due to the greater flexibility they offer. Another important activity is the sale of merchandising. Both work in turn as advertising and exhibition methods. Bearing this in mind, and together with the participants' responses regarding changes throughout their careers, the following table summarizes the different phases of the independent music career in the Spanish urban scene. It presents the main milestones to be achieved in each of the stages.

Figure 1

Career path and informal milestones of the independent artist

CAREER STAGE	MILESTONES	
Hobby	Sharing music with friends	Focus just on creativity
Amateur	Uploading music online	More attention to humdrum inputs
Semi-professional	Finding your own sound / Finding your artistic identity / Music as secondary source of income	Shows and merchandise / Expanding outside the locality
Professional	Music as primary source of income	Work in formal economy (Freelancing, register brands, set up business)

(Left axis: Informal Economy; Right axis: Community Building)

As can be seen in Figure 1, in the first phase the musical activity constitutes a hobby, and the participants invest their free time in developing themselves musically. In most cases, the inputs are usually shared only with close friends. In this phase, the first informal milestones occur. Positive feedback from this close circle encourages the continuation of the activity. In its development, the sound is improved (sound quality and/or artistic quality) which encourages career progress. In the course of these interactions, first collaborations may occur but do not usually extend beyond the immediate network of the aspiring artist.

The next step involves sharing music online, which requires at least the creation of a profile and a small investment to distribute on platforms. Eventually, this decision leads to paying more attention to the creation of an artistic identity and a characteristic sound. This does not necessarily occur at the beginning of this phase but is a milestone to complete throughout the amateur and semi-professional phases. Online exposure and high competitiveness cause a greater impact of the humdrum inputs surrounding artistic production in a battle for attention and the development of a community. This increases the activities necessary for the optimal development of artistic production and distribution and pushes independent artists to collaborate. The growth of that community will involve different milestones (generate viral content or reach a specific number of monthly listeners) that help in the artist's incorporation into the local proto-market. During the

amateur phase, the first shows take place, normally unpaid. They can also start selling merchandise, although this generates small income or covers the expenses.

Due to the lack of formal structures and established pathways, the transition between amateur and semi-professional is not completely clear and differs between artists. However, if music manages to become a stable secondary source of income, the artist can position himself closer to the semi-professional level. In the same way, in the advancement as an amateur, the shows and the sale of merchandise begin to escalate as an activity. This causes the expansion of the artists outside his locality. First, the expansion occurs in neighbouring cities belonging to the region and later establishes the objective of performing at the country level.

In the last stage, it can be assumed that the artist has completed the creation of his artistic identity and has a differentiated quality sound. The community has grown and is not just limited to a small network. The income allows musical activity to be positioned as the main source of income and this fact facilitates the exit from an informal economy. Bureaucratic professionalisation often involves registering trademarks or creating small businesses. Those are the preferred options chosen over being a freelancer.

These findings contradict the idea that musicians continue to perceive the traditional career path as the only viable option (Everts et al., 2022). The lack of economic opportunities is compensated with self-management based on collaboration and the creation of local proto-markets supported by communities of fans.

5.1. Collaboration as a necessary practice for career development

One of the main findings of this research was the importance of collaboration and working together for career development. The Spanish urban music scene constitutes a collaborative scene that promotes social, political and cultural values. Before art commercialisation, independent artists need peer support to promote a career in its early stages. It is another example of how young people choose a modest lifestyle in exchange for freedom in their careers (Bennett, 2018).

First, collaboration occurs as reinforcement and help for one's own recognition as an artist. Due to the previously described difficulties that independent artists encounter in defining themselves and their careers, collaboration with other artists serves as a signal and avoids uncertainty regarding one's own quality, mitigating the existing quality

uncertainty (Akerlof, 1970). Furthermore, there exists the possibility of a division of the tasks that a DIY artist would develop by himself. This can translate into adding processes not previously contemplated by the artist individually but equally important for the development of a career. For example, improvement of technical aspects in musical production or greater concern for the visual identity that accompanies the artist. In the context of the urban scene, collaboration allows the incorporation of new points of view into a genre that is in an experimentation phase, fusing different styles and genres. Collaborations that occur exclusively as featurings, in addition to constituting a collective artistic creation, allow the sharing of communities between artists. This fact positively affects the reach and impact of artists in the early phases of their careers.

In this way, collaboration between independent artists is not only a way of creating art or a tool for artistic innovation (Becker, 2008) or the simple exchange of resources. It appears as an almost necessary condition for making progress in the careers of artists with limited resources.

The organisation of parties constitutes one of the greatest examples of collaboration and joint work. Parties bridge individual benefit and collective benefit. Artists can perform for larger audiences. This format can also attract a public that joins the party without necessarily being attracted to any of the smaller acts. At the same time, the small communities of different artists can be shared in the same event, promoting the growth of both. Additionally, by sharing expenses, the costs of carrying out these events are reduced. Finally, the organisation of parties creates spaces to build a greater network with the circuit of commerce of the local scene.

5.2. Informal milestones in independent careers

According to Everts et al. (2022), artists collect milestones to use as signals of quality. They argue that these signals are used to influence traditional industry intermediaries. In their sample, most participants felt a dependency on the traditional career path as they could not find sources of financing outside of it. However, after the analysis of the results, independent artists showed no interest in entering a traditional career path. It seems quite the opposite, artists seek to maintain an independent career in favour of autonomy and authenticity.

Despite the great connectivity available to independent artists, these independent careers often develop at a local level in the early stages. The scene and its circuit of commerce present informality and generate alternative markets in response to the lack of support offered by traditional structures (Alacovska, 2022; Smolka & Heugens, 2020). These alternative markets are not solely driven by economic factors. Thus, they should be considered proto-markets (Toynbee, 2016).

In the context of an independent career, despite the blurred lines demarcating the amateur and semi-professional levels, independent artists also make use of milestones. Nevertheless, these milestones are not aimed at traditional intermediaries (Everts et al., 2022). Rather they make up a set of informal objectives with which to delimit the progress of a career with little institutional support. Consequently, none of these achievements are obtained within an official circuit of commerce in which one can find traditional music industry networks (Keunen, 2014). The vast majority of them occur in more informal circuits of commerce, the proto-markets. In the case of this research, those specific to the local urban music scene in Spain. These milestones must be analysed and taken into account. Some are shared with those of artists who follow a traditional career, but others are unique to independent artists or have a greater impact in this context.

Informal milestones are obtained throughout an artist's career. Being informal, they do not always occur in the same order for all artists nor do they understand them in the same way. Considering **Figure 1**, each of the main milestones included can be composed of several milestones. For instance, ''uploading music online'' could involve uploading music to YouTube or SoundCloud first and then moving to Spotify. The milestone ''more attention to humdrum inputs'' could integrate collaborating with a visual artist for the artist's image or connect with a collective that organises events in the locality. ''Finding your own sound'' and ''Finding your artistic identity'' encompasses the visual aesthetic one wants to offer but also involves creating the narrative around the artist. For ''Shows and merchandise'' it is possible to include giving a first performance in a small venue in the artist's locality, then performing in a collaborative show, being paid for the first time, or being able to sell a small drop of t-shirts.

6. Conclusions

In this thesis, I have researched the current situation in which independent urban music production is carried out in Spain. The aim was to answer the main research question: How do urban music artists create proto-markets in local music scenes and contribute to establishing independent career paths? How do these artists understand and build their career path?

Certain musical scenes develop in informal markets. The music scene (Straw, 2004) and the specific networks of that circuit of commerce (Zelizer, 2010) advance not in traditional markets but in proto-markets (Smolka & Heugens, 2020; Toynbee, 2016).

Artists of this research are an example of Alacovska's (2022) creative professionals. They lack a stable income and traditional employment benefits because their activity is part of alternative economic practices developed within the informal economy of Spain. The DIY approach is chosen by Spanish independent artists not only for its cultural and social value (Bennett, 2018) but also as a critique against the traditional music industry and the commodification of music. Their audience also values this, and it promotes a supportive fanbase they call community. Of course, the situation generates entrepreneurial tendencies among this type of artist which is consistent with Haynes & Marshall (2018) and their thoughts on the evolution of the music industry. These cultural entrepreneurs (Scott, 2012) or artrepreneurs (Peltz, 2006) benefit from the circumstances brought by e-commerce and its ease of connecting artists and audiences (Fox, 2004).

The findings reveal that independent artists in the Spanish urban music scene create communities that value cultural capital, authenticity and autonomy brought by artistic independence offer. In this sense, the use of local resources supports the creation of an authentic identity. In the context of globalisation and oversaturated markets, being local and acting locally helps to differentiate and obtain competitive advantages. These communities and local collaborations become fundamental in the initial stages of an independent artist's career, providing motivation and functioning as informal signals of quality.

Additionally, the lack of institutional support and the characteristics of the Spanish music industry (Barrachina, 2022) force artists to rely on informal economies to generate an initial income. This shapes their self-perception as professional artists and their career

path. These informal economies are mostly supported by the selling of merchandise and the organisation of shows, which in the early phases of a career take the form of parties or collaborative shows. This helps to enhance the artist's community and share resources in a local context. These two practices usually occur after the creation of an online profile and, together with the development of the artist's identity, form part of the set of milestones with which an independent artist builds his or her professional career. Due to the characteristics of proto-markets and local networks, the milestones (Everts et al., 2022) achieved by independent musicians can be labelled as informal milestones as they are not directed to the traditional industry and classic intermediaries.

Collaboration appears to be fundamental for the development of the individual career since it allows greater dedication to the humdrum inputs that surround the primary artistic activity. As Everts et al. (2022) explained, music careers present a multifaceted nature including a diverse set of activities. Collaboration allows building expertise on concrete tasks and, therefore, advancing in a professional career.

These conclusions, however, are not exempt from certain limitations. One limitation of this research was the inherently informal nature of the urban music scene. The lack of formal structures and established pathways may introduce variability in the experiences of independent artists, making it challenging to generalise the obtained findings. The study may not be representative of the entire population of independent urban music artists in Spain. Another limitation was the lack of response from individuals in the professional stage. This led to further exploration of the amateur level and its transition to the semi-professional level.

Future steps to consider after carrying out this research could involve a more in-depth analysis of the transition between amateur and semi-professional to professional. This would allow obtaining more information on the exit of these artists from an informal economy. Following the ideas of Smolka & Heugens (2020), their model of the development of proto-institutions and their different stages could be applied to musical scenes. This could allow us to offer critical judgments on the best measures to promote the development of the economy these institutions generate.

Independent artists can make use of these findings to inform their career strategies. Fostering collaborations, building strong communities, and achieving informal

milestones are helpful while navigating the complex and changing music industry. Additionally, relying on authenticity and autonomy can empower independent artists to create unique pathways to success and professionalisation.

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8. Appendix

Table 1

Interview Guide

Topic	Explanation & Goal	Questions
Before recording	Introduction to the interview.	
	Remind the interviewee the interview will be recorded	
	Inform the interviewees that they can skip questions they would rather not answer.	
START RECORDING **Introduction** **Career starts**	Some general questions to get to know better the participants and their situation.	Would you like to tell me a bit about yourself and your work? (Name, age, activities related to their creative work…)
	Make the interviewee comfortable and start to build a safe space for dialogue.	When and how did you start making music?
Urban music scene perception and self-perception within it **Career development**	Start to introduce the research topic.	*What is urban music for you? Would you say you belong to this category?*
	Discuss what is the urban music scene perspective of the interviewee.	*Has something changed in the scene? Is it territorialized?*
	Get to know the interviewee's self-perception as an artist and his/her role within the scene. (Keep in mind the different categories: DIY, professional artists, arts education…)	What gives value to this scene? What are the alternative ways of economic assessment (monies)?

		Could you describe a moment of change in your artistic career? (From hobby to amateur, from amateur to professional) What are your future plans/next career goals?
Skills and tasks of the urban music artist and if they do it through collaboration / collectiveness	Discover what **skills and tasks** are necessary for the development of their activities.	What are the activities you usually undertake to accomplish your artistic goals? What is your priority?
	Differentiate between **DIY and outsourcing**, and if this outsourcing is done under **collaboration or collectivity**.	Do you **collaborate** with someone to reach your goals? **Who and how?** **Do you think collaboration or collectivity leads to career development?**
	Are there changes after working together collectively? (Creation / Distribution / Career)	**In which ways? Is it necessary?**
Digitalisation and new technologies. Recent changes and effects.	If new technologies and platforms have changed their approach.	In the last years technology has affected the music industry. Have you been affected by this recently? Has this affected in some way the development of your artistic career?
	Focus on recent changes, last year's innovations or platforms.	*What are the platforms you rely on?* *Do they help to build your market / the scene?*
Traditional Industry vs independent creation	Talk about the traditional industry in today's context.	Do you think the traditional music industry is still necessary to reach success?

Compare it to independent production and find the opportunities and challenges.

What are the advantages or challenges of independent artistic production and distribution?

If any, who are the gatekeepers for independent artists?

Which are **the specific circuits of commerce** in the independent urban scene?

How do you tackle the constraints of an independent career?

Find gatekeepers in the alternative modes of music production.

Economic alternatives	Focus on the ideas of artists choosing wageless modes of life and poverty.	How do you finance your music?
Proto-markets as a way of validation/funding	Is this the case?	
		What are the options available for **the monetization of your music or related activities?**
	Find the economic activities used for supporting their artistic practices.	
		What's the role of live music for you? What about merchandising?
		What are the difficulties of getting shows?
		How do you tackle those problems?

		How do you see your economic future concerning your music?
Closing	Wrap up the interview and ask any doubt.	**Pay attention to interesting subquestions** that may arise during the conversation.
	Ask the participant if he/she would like to add something else	WRITE THEM DOWN.

Table 2

Participant list

Participant Nº	Role	Age	Gender	Residence	Making a living out of music?
1	Producer, song writer, singer	24	M	Sevilla	No
2	Producer, guitarist, songwriter, singer	26	M	Barcelona	No
3	Songwriter, rapper	30	M	A Coruña	No
4	Songwriter, rapper	27	M	A Coruña	No
5	Songwriter, singer, dancer	25	M	Sevilla	No
6	Songwriter, dancer, singer	28	W	Granada	No

7	Singer, dancer, producer	25	W	Valencia	No
8	Singer	28	W	Sevilla	Yes
9	Singer, songwriter, filmmaker	21	M	Sevilla	No
10	Singer, producer	22	M	Sevilla	No
11	Singer, songwriter, dancer	25	W	Huelva	Yes
12	Singer, songwriter	24	W	Barcelona	No
13	Singer	26	M	Cadiz	No
14	Producer	32	M	Sevilla	Yes

Table 3

Participant Interview coding details

Code name	Description	Number of quotes
Authenticity and autonomy	Considered as monies for alternative economic assessment	25
Building community	Participants were often differentiating between the	58

	general audience and their community, understood as loyal supporters or fans	
Career development	Reflections on changes in their independent career. Changes from Hobby to Amateur or Amateur to (semi) professional	89
Collaboration/Collectivity	Related to art making through collective or collaborative activity and the influence of this in career development	70
Financing an independent career	How participants shifted from secondary jobs and alternative sources of income to an art-related income	56
New technologies and platforms	Recent changes and effects on building community	31
Shows and merchandise	In terms of market making but also as a tool for career development	65
Tasks and skills of the independent artist	Main activities carried out by participants	32
Urban music scene characteristics	General thought on the scene	19

Table 4

Podcasts and online interviews coding

17-08-2023	14:52 min	24 horas con Kaydy Cain | GQ España	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SwxeMPX__NY&ab_channel=GQSpain

CODE	QUOTE
Collaboration/Collectivity	'Un amigo del barrio me dijo: Yo hago música no se qué. Yo le dije que hacía canciones pero no tenía donde grabarlas y el me conectó con unos chicos'
Career development	'El nombre es HoneyMoney, dinero dulce, es un sello de música para captar artistas que yo crea que tienen potencial o que yo creo que suenan bacano pero no le dan el apoyo que les tienen que dar porque no tengan números'
Authenticity and autonomy as monies	'Tuve suerte y metí dos temas en el GTA, eso es lo mejor que he hecho… no creo en los premios, no creo que porque me den un premio sea mejor que ayer… pero a mi esto si me hace ilusión porque el GTA es un juego que se conoce en todo el mundo y que es del barrio para el barrio'
Tasks and skills of the independent artist	'Es super disciplinado, se lo toma como se lo debería tomar todo el mundo, como un trabajo, invierte sus horas igual que si fuese a otro sitio y los resultados se notan'

23-09-2022	11:54 min	Yung Beef: 24 horas con el padrino del trap español | GQ España	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kdSyroC6LXQ&ab_channel=GQSpain

CODE	QUOTE
Career development	'Estamos aquí montando el estudio, en el sur no se por qué, quizá porque no hay mucho trabajo pero hay mucho arte'
Shows and merchandise	'Empezamos a hacer fiestas, PXXR GANG PARTY, Dani se vino y deje de trabajar'
Tasks and skills of the independent artists	'Como esta la vida tienes que hacer muchas cosas para tirar adelante, el es un ingeniero, beatmaker… Todo el sonido y las giras las llevo con el, tenemos la misma visión… al final nos hemos asociado y hemos hecho un estudio aquí. Para trabajar nosotros o para cualquiera que lo quiera bookear'
Collaboration and collectivity	'Yo no estoy firmado ni nada, yo puedo sacar trabajos con quien yo quiera pero no voy a firmar una exclusividad. Yo trabajo con quien me haga una buena oferta, tengo un abogado que es amigo mio no de ellos. Los tres discos que vamos a sacar van a salir de nuestro sello'
Building Community	La música la hago para compartir, eso es lo principal, después hay mil maneras de explotarlo. Si yo en un momento quiero compartir algo, que nada me pare, que no tenga que ser todo marketing… al final el antimarketing es hasta mejor, como esta todo tan cuadriculado…'
Career development	'Siempre lo he visto como un trabajo, no lo veo como un privilegio, oh que suerte… tampoco siento que sea especial es otro trabajo más'
Uncertainty	'Es muy loco la música, es relativo, te puedes rayar mucho pero tampoco sirve'

21-03-2023	42:41	YUNG BEEF le tira a Dios, habla de Bad Bunny, el beef con C. Tangana y la música de calle en España	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qTp8jvupMkM&ab_channel=H%C3%A9ctorEl%C3%AD

CODE	QUOTE
Urban music scene characteristics	'Yo no noto mucha diferencia, ni con el reaggeton, ni con el rap, ni con el trap, yo al final noto que todo viene de lo mismo, de un sufrimiento, de una marginación y de querer ayudar con tu música y tu experiencia'
Collaboration/Collectivity	'Siempre me ha gustado la unión, considero que la gente que estamos en la misma situación ganamos mucho uniéndonos. En la música hay mucha gente que está solo por negocio. Siempre es bueno hablar y controlar tu trabajo y no depender de gente mas grande'
Career Development	'Firmamos con Sony, fue raro, fue por ignorancia. Nuestros nombres nunca los firmamos, firmamos el proyecto. Nos dimos cuenta de lo que era la industria y que nosotros no encajamos ahí. Ahí nos dimos cuenta de que teníamos que hacer La Vendición, que teníamos que hacer nuestro propio record label, a nuestra manera. El que no lo hace es porque no quiere o porque no sabe, que es lo que no pasaba a nosotros'
Career development	'No veo mal profesionalizar la música, lo veo bien, pero desde los artistas, los ingenieros, desde la gente que trabaja la música, no gente que solo hace negocio'
Collaboration/Collectivity	'La Vendición no es una pirámide, no hay mandos, la música manda. Está creciendo mucho y estamos llegando

	a niveles que nunca había pensado. Ya estamos en primera liga, ya no somos underground, nuestra calidad de música es muy fuerte'		

05-12-2023	1:32:09	**CLUB 113 | RELS B**	**https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-S6KFndRJec&t=1050s&ab_channel=Club113**

CODE	QUOTE
Financing an independent career	'En el mundo musical el que no tiene dinero a día de hoy yo le diría que no le de tanta importancia al videoclip y que no se preocupe mucho, para el que no puede permitirse una cosa como esa, ya no es tan producente hacer eso… Spotify esta dominando el mundo de una manera que sacas los singles y funcionan sin video. Yo tengo una canción con 160 millones y no tiene videoclip'
Collaboration/Collectivity	'El videoclip que más tardé… 5 días, cuando no había presu, con Cráneo… Si hay dinero… claro todo es más fácil (…) Ahora ellos tienen una nave y compran ellos sus cosas, es más barato que alquilar siempre'
Shows and merchandise	'Es guay estar nominado para premios, pero todo ese proceso que hay que hacer, yo que soy tan anti… tan real, me gusta la realidad. Siento que si lo gano no lo voy a disfrutar como hacer un estadio grande y lo hemos vendido, eso es gente de verdad que ha venido a vernos, que tiene un valor de verdad'
Career development	'No lo veo artístico, una canción por semana… No me gusta la fábrica de música, hay artistas que se dedican a eso y molan pero sus carreras son cortas porque aburren'

New technologies and platforms	'Spotify tiene un problema con el algoritmo, te relaciona solo con la movida del género que acabas de escuchar (…) no te da esa variedad'