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Entrepreneurial, precarious or leaving altogether? Work trajectories in the creative industries in the Netherlands

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ABSTRACT

This article seeks to identify variety in work trajectories in the cultural and creative industries (CCI) and the extent to which structural inequalities can be observed in who ends up in which trajectory. The omnipresent inequalities in the sector suggest that some might be in a better position to escape precarious trajectories than others. Multichannel sequence analysis is used to map the work trajectories of employees, employers and self-employed workers in the CCI in the Netherlands over 10 years. The results show that more than half of them leave the sector during the observation window. Contrary to what is often assumed, characteristics of traditional careers can be observed alongside flexible ones. Work trajectories characterised by flexible labour market positions are also the most precarious in terms of income, but make it more likely that workers stay. However, staying in the sector is less achievable for marginalised groups.

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Precarious work; work trajectories; cultural and creative industries; structural inequalities; flexibilization; register data

Introduction

The Cultural and Creative Industries (CCI) is a sector of the economy characterised by the paradoxical situation of a highly motivated, passionate and above average educated workforce facing precarious working conditions (Brook et al., 2021). Workers in the cultural and creative industries, which include many subsectors, ranging from performing arts to creative business services such as public relations and communications (Throsby, 2008), are reported to share a great passion for their work, viewing it as a lifestyle rather than just a job, and as a means of self-realisation (Bennett & Hennekam, 2018; Gill & Pratt, 2008; Siebert & Wilson, 2013). Yet, at the same time, a large body of literature has indicated that working conditions in this sector, such as pay and work security, are precarious for many (De Peuter, 2011; Gill & Pratt, 2008; Longden & Throsby, 2021; Menger, 2017). Moreover, work in the sector has become less secure than it used to be, with an increasing number of workers holding flexible contracts, juggling multiple jobs, or being self-employed, which also results in lower levels of remuneration (Woronkowicz, 2015).

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These features of low pay and the flexibilization of the CCI are common to all countries. However, the pace and extent of flexibilization varies, with the Netherlands showing rapid flexibilization, reflecting the trend that labour market flexibilization there exceeds that of other European countries (Been & Keune, 2022).

The developments in the working conditions of the CCI are a reflection of general tendencies towards an increase of precarious work in post-Fordist labour markets (Azmanova, 2020; Lohmann, 2009; Vosko, 2010). Risks that used to be carried by employers, such as shifts in demand of products and services and economic fluctuations, are now increasingly on the shoulders of individual workers (Baccaro & Howell, 2011; Bulfone & Afonso, 2020; Rueda, 2014; Streeck, 2009, p. 2016). Precarious working conditions used to be associated with workers with a weaker bargaining position on the labour market, such as lower skilled and migrant workers working in sectors that require general rather than specific skills such as the meat industry or horticulture (Standing, 2011). However, they are nowadays also increasingly found among the higher educated and in sectors that require high levels of specific training, which is exemplified by the CCI (Been et al., 2023; Brook et al., 2021).

A possible explanation for the precarious working conditions in the cultural and creative industries despite its workers' characteristics, is that the bargaining power of workers in this sector is undermined by a combination of the mindset of creative workers and the structure and organisation of work. Firstly, workers' passion for their profession makes them willing to accept precarious working conditions in exchange for the opportunity to pursue the work they love (Been & Keune, 2022). Secondly, the winner-takes-all and hit-driven nature of the CCI makes the immediate sacrifice in material working conditions potentially worthwhile in terms of career success; a breakthrough or becoming the next superstar might be just around the corner (Berg, 2022; Hesmondhalgh & Baker, 2015). Thirdly, the large-scale adoption of a project-based organisation of work in the sector in recent decades does not only account for the presence of precarious working conditions, but also for their increase (Caves, 2000; DeFillippi & Arthur, 1998; Eikhoff & Warhurst, 2013; Pulignano et al., 2023). A project-based organisation of work often (but not necessarily, see: Casper & Storz, 2017) goes hand in hand with temporary contracts for the duration that people are needed in the context of a project or, alternatively, it involves gathering self-employed workers in temporary coalitions around projects (Eikhoff & Warhurst, 2013; McGuigan, 2014; Peticca-Harris et al., 2015). This not only contributes to job insecurity but also results in marginal earnings: the need for workers to repeatedly search for new projects once their current one concludes diminishes their bargaining power. Studies have also highlighted that workers have begun to accept and normalise short-term positions, believing that a permanent position cannot offer the liberation, excitement, or flexibility they seek (Morgan et al., 2013). The expression of entrepreneurial values by the broader workforce and the self-exploitation that accompanies it has been described as the internalisation of capitalism (Chung, 2022) or venture labour (Neff, 2012).

These explanations for the prevalence of precarious work in the CCI seem to suggest that many workers in this sector may have fallen into a trap of long-term precariousness throughout their working lives, characterised by low earnings, a succession of flexible labour market positions and many moves between them (Pedaci, 2010). However, the literature is inconclusive as to what work histories in CCIs look like across the sector. Most of

the evidence on precarious work is based on case studies of workers in specific occupations, rather than long-term observations of different groups of workers in the sector (e.g. Bennett, 2009 on music and dance; Blair, 2001 on the film industry; McGuigan, 2014 on television; Neff et al., 2005 on fashion and new media; Thompson et al., 2016 on the games industry; Umney & Kretsos, 2015 on London jazz musicians). The few longitudinal studies that are there tend to focus on recent graduates and show that their positions are often precarious throughout their first years in the sector (e.g. Bridgstock, 2007; Comunian et al., 2011). However, as working conditions are often more precarious and less stable at the start of a career, the focus on new entrants may have led to an overestimation of existing flexibility and precariousness. This would mean that the landscape of working conditions and work trajectories in the CCI is potentially more diverse than we often assume. *The first aim of this study is therefore to get a better understanding of the flexibility and precarity within the CCI labour market through providing an overview of work trajectories observed amongst workers across the CCI.*

The literature on the CCI shows that inequalities are wide-spread (e.g. Brook et al., 2021; O'Brien et al., 2016). This could also translate to inequalities in work trajectories. Since workers in the CCI tend to be highly skilled, they have the option to move to careers in other sectors of the economy that offer more sustainable working conditions. This might also mean that those who remain in the sector long enough to build a successful career are those who have the resources to do so and for whom the sector is more accommodating, which in turn might contribute to widespread inequalities in the sector (Dent, 2020; Faggian et al., 2013; Hennekam & Bennett, 2016). Literature on workers leaving the cultural and creative industries indeed show that women, especially around child birth, are overrepresented amongst those leaving the sector, as are those with a migration background (Percival, 2020). However, since we lack evidence on the characteristics of work trajectories of workers in the CCI, also later on in their careers, we do not know to what extent they reflect general inequalities in the sector. *The second aim of this study is therefore to analyse the extent to which structural inequalities in work trajectories can be observed across the CCI.*

The forerunner position of the Netherlands in terms of flexibilization of the labour market in general and the CCI specifically (Been & Keune, 2022), makes it an interesting case study. It provides insight in the foreland of working conditions in the CCI in other countries as the sector is becoming more flexible across countries. To analyse the work trajectories within the CCI in the Netherlands, register data from Statistics Netherlands will be used. This dataset offers a unique opportunity to comprehensively map work trajectories, as it includes monthly observations of the labour market positions and earning levels of all workers in the sector. This allows for including workers from a wide range of sub-sectors belonging to the CCI and thus beyond the specific groups of core creative workers that tend to be the focus of the majority of the literature on careers in the CCI. To compile an overview of various types of work trajectories that might be present in the sector, a cohort of all workers who had earnings from work in the sector in January 2010 will be followed for a period of 10 years, concluding just before the COVID-19 crisis to avoid the abnormal effects this period may have had. All workers are included in order to provide a cross-section of all work trajectories present in the sector during the 10-year observation window. It is important to note that the trajectories are both left and right censored: workers are observed at different stages of their working lives.

This study should therefore be interpreted as an attempt to show what work in the sector looks like and the diversity that exists, rather than a comparison of individual careers. All workers in the sector are included, not only those in creative professions. After all, the labour market context of the sector, including the prevalence of a project-based organisation of work, affects all workers, and all positions are necessary to keep the sector running.

Creative careers versus contemporary careers

The flexible and project-based organisation of work in the CCI is often seen as a model for the future labour market, as flexibility is considered an effective way to cope with the uncertainties of a globalised economy. This is reflected in the increasing flexibilization of the labour market and careers over the past few decades. Traditional careers were characterised by long-term employment within one or a few settings, often involving internal promotions (Sullivan, 1999). However, since the mid-1980s, career types incorporating elements of flexibility have become more prominent (Chudzikowski, 2012). Nowadays, many workers hold various types of flexible contracts, job mobility is common, and non-linear career trajectories are increasingly prevalent (Arthur & Rousseau, 1996; Bridgstock, 2007; Casper & Storz, 2017; Defillippi & Arthur, 1994; Gill & Pratt, 2008). Multiple jobholding is often adopted as an individual coping strategy to minimise the risk of unemployment, as is switching between different types of employment, including breaking away from traditional organisations to start one's own company (Serafini & Banks, 2020; Sullivan, 1999; Throsby & Zednik, 2011). Self-employment has thus become a viable option (Arthur et al., 2005; Arthur & Rousseau, 1996; Casper & Storz, 2017), facilitated by employees often collaborating closely with self-employed workers on the same projects, thus reducing the boundaries between these two types of labour market positions (Bennett & Bridgstock, 2015; Lingo & Tepper, 2013). Careers characterised by these contemporary elements are referred to as boundaryless careers (Rodrigues & Guest, 2010). As the CCI is seen as an extreme case of labour market flexibility, we can expect work trajectories in this sector to resemble the characteristics of boundaryless careers: flexible contracts, the prominence of self-employment and mobility, which includes switching between labour market positions, such as from a temporary contract to self-employment.

However, careers in the CCI are not only characterised by flexibility but also by workers' passion for their occupation. This combination is referred to in the literature as protean careers (Bridgstock, 2007; Goodwin, 2019). Workers in these career types are described as having flexible contracts, a strong internal drive, a commitment to themselves rather than to an organisation, a sense of responsibility for their own career development, and a continuous process of self-reinvention in accordance with personal and labour market needs (Bridgstock, 2007). Workers with protean careers often strongly identify with their profession or sector, experiencing working life as an expression of the self. They are driven less by material returns and more by intrinsic factors (Bridgstock, 2007). Even though workers in boundaryless careers might eventually settle into steady career paths with permanent contracts (see, for example, the stepping-stone theory), this is less likely for those in protean careers. An important reason is the lack of necessity for employers to offer better working conditions. If workers are less motivated by material rewards and strongly identify with their profession, they are more likely to continue

working within that profession even when working conditions are precarious and potentially better opportunities are available elsewhere (Hennekam & Bennett, 2016). This suggests that we are likely to observe work trajectories in the CCI characterised by long-term flexible labour market positions and marginal levels of earnings.

Structural inequalities in career paths

Structural inequalities are a persistent problem in the CCI (Brook et al., 2021; Eikhoff & Warhurst, 2013). Women and minority groups leave the sector more often (Dent, 2020; Hennekam & Bennett, 2016; Percival, 2020) and report lower earnings (Been et al., 2023; Faggian et al., 2013; O'Brien et al., 2016). The project-based organisation of the sector contributes to this issue, since coalitions to work on projects are often assembled based on network connections (Hermes et al., 2017; Wreyford, 2015). Using networks mitigates the risks of recruiting ineffective project members and lowers searching costs (Caves, 2000). Networks, however, also have the tendency to be homogeneous meaning that it is likely that project members resemble each other and that it is hard for outsiders to find their way in or climb the hierarchies (Basov, 2020; Le et al., 2014). Also, social and cultural matching plays a role (Brook et al., 2021), with recruiters in the industry paying more attention to soft characteristics and perceptions of the candidate than competences (Basov, 2020). This enhances the risk of recruiters hiring people that resemble themselves, creating barriers for others to start and sustain a successful creative career with gender, race and class as important dividing lines (Brook et al., 2021; Hesmondhalgh & Baker, 2015). In addition, the requirement to do unpaid work to take the first steps on the CCI labour market is not equally realistic for all, leading to inequalities in who is able to sustain a career and endure beyond the first phase of employment (Brook et al., 2021). Moreover, for women pregnancy and maternity leave often leads to the decision to quit work in the CCI due to the long working hours culture they feel does not match with child caring responsibilities (Percival, 2020) as well as the dissolvements of networks and loss of projects that make it hard to sustain a successful career path after the birth of a child (Dent, 2020). It can thus be expected that women and workers with a migration background are more likely to have work trajectories in the CCI characterised by flexible labour market positions and marginal earning-levels or leaving the sector altogether.

Data and method

Data

To analyse work trajectories in the CCI in the Netherlands, the Social Statistical Dataset (SSD) of Statistics Netherlands is used (Bakker et al., 2014). The SSD contains micro level register data on all people active on the labour market in the Netherlands. Statistics Netherlands collected this data by combining information from the basis integral registration ("Polisadministratie"), from the tax administration ("belastingdienst") and the Employee Insurance Agency ("UWV") (Bakker et al., 2014). Since we want to take into account everyone with income from work in the sector, we combine datasets on employees and self-employed workers.

Table 1. NACE-codes used to select workers in the CCI.

Category	Sub-sector	NACE code
Creative business services	Public relations and communication activities	70.21
	Architecture	71.11
	Advertising agencies	73.11
	Industrial design	74.10
Media and entertainment industry	Publishing activities	58
	Motion picture, video and television programme production, sound recording and music publishing activities	59
	Photography	74.20.1
Arts	Practice of Performing Arts	90.01.1
	Producers of Performing Arts	90.01.2
	Support activities to performing arts	90.02
	Artistic creation	90.03
Cultural heritage	Cultural learning and archives activities	91.01.9
	Museums activities	91.02.1
	Operation of historical sites and buildings and similar visitor attractions	91.03

The CCI were demarcated using the NACE-codes of the definition of the Dutch government in their top sector policy program. This definition contains both the arts and business driven creative subsectors. Table 1 gives an overview of the subsectors and their corresponding NACE codes included in the analyses. Workers with at least one position in the CCI are included, containing employees and self-employed workers (including larger business owners). This selection means that embedded creative workers are not included, but those active in the CCI that do non-creative work are allowing studying career paths of all workers in the CCI.

Method

In order to study work trajectories in the creative industries, a cohort of workers is followed for a period of 120 months: from January 2010 to December 2019. For the cohort, all workers with a position in the CCI in January 2010 were selected and monthly observations of their labour market position and their earnings created. Workers below the age of 18 were dropped from the analyses as are workers above 65 in January 2010. This resulted in a cohort of a total of 186.251 workers of all different age groups and in all different phases of their careers. From this selection of workers, a random sample of 20 percent was drawn (N = 36.999), since the total population is too large for the models used. The models were run on 10 random samples to check for robustness in outcomes. Each random sample resulted in similar clusters of career trajectories, indicating that the sub-sample presented is a true representation of the variety in the whole population of work trajectories in the selected cohort of workers during the observation period.

Following others that study careers (Mattijssen & Pavlopoulos, 2019), multichannel sequence analysis was applied to analyse work trajectories in the CCI in terms of labour market positions and earnings. This method allows for analysing sets of events that are ordered in time (work trajectories), taking into account multiple characteristics (type of labour market position and earnings). Two channels are thus taken into account simultaneously. The first channel of sequences contains the type of labour market position of an individual in a given month. At the start of the period (January 2010), we distinguish

five different options: (1) permanent contract, (2) temporary contract, (3) employer, (4) solo self-employed worker and (5) multiple jobholder. In the successive months two possible states were added: (6) "pension age" and (7) "not in the CCI". Workers were set to have reached pension age in the year after they turned 65, regardless whether they actually exited the labour market or not. The second channel contains the earnings of an individual in a given month. Earnings are measured as the gross-income per month out of all jobs combined (both CCI and elsewhere in case of multiple jobholders). Special payments and bonuses are excluded. For the self-employed, their yearly income which they provide on their yearly statements to the tax-office is used. If workers combine self-employment with employment, earnings are added up. They are then broken up into categories to be able to judge whether earning levels are low: marginal earnings (<2/3 national mean of the year of observation), (2) lower earnings (between 2/3 of the national mean in the observation year – national mean), (3) higher earnings (national mean in the observation year – 1.5*the national mean), (4) high earnings (> 1.5* national mean). When workers leave the CCI, their income levels are marked as having "no income from the CCI".

The basic premise of multichannel sequence analysis is to determine similarities in sequences: thus, which kind of work trajectories of individuals in the CCI look alike and which clusters of similar trajectories can thus be distinguished in the sector during the 10-year observation window. Comparing work trajectories over time is done by first assigning "costs' to each transition from state A to state B. Hereto the Hamming distance costs setting is used. To take both channels into account simultaneously and to calculate costs on the combination of the two states, a combined channel is created that forms the basis for the calculation of similar sequences. The combined cost of each work trajectory is then used to compute the distance between all occurring trajectories. The smaller the distance, the more similar they are (Gauthier et al., 2010). Similar work trajectories end up in a cluster together.

Next, Ward clustering (Ward, 1963) was applied to group similar trajectories into clusters and arrive at a typology of career paths present in the group under study (Abbott & Tsay, 2000; Gauthier et al., 2010; Mattijssen & Pavlopoulos, 2019). The package TraMineR (Gabadinho et al., 2011) developed for the programme R was used to run these analyses. In addition, the WeightedCluster package (Studer, 2013) was used to apply cluster analysis. This resulted in clusters of similar career trajectories observed in the CCI. To determine the solution with the optimal number of clusters, the elbow method was applied (see Appendix 1 for the plot).

In the final step, multinominal logistic regression models were used to regress which groups of workers are more likely to be part of certain clusters than others. The clusters that resulted from the previous steps were the dependent variable in these models. Since workers in all different stages of their career are included, different clusters might also resemble different career stages. The various clusters observed should therefore be interpreted as a cross-section of what work trajectories in the sector look like.

Explanatory variables and control variables

Different variables were added to the multinominal logistic regression models to explore structural inequalities in who ends up in which type of career trajectory. *Sex* is operationalised as male/female and added to the analysis as a dummy variable

with male as the reference category. *Migration background* is measured as being a first generation or second-generation migrant, with "no migration background" as the reference category.

Various control variables were added. *Educational level* is added as "low", "middle" and "high" to the models, with higher levels indicating more years of schooling. "High" educational level serves as the reference category. Not for everyone belonging to the CCI the educational level is known. This variable is constructed by Statistics Netherlands using several sources, of which the "Werknemers Enquete Arbeid" [Survey Worker Population] is an important one. Since employers are not targeted by this survey, their educational level is more often unknown. For this reason, the educational category "unknown" was added to the data. *Age* is captured by adding year of birth to the analysis as a continuous variable and proxy to control for the different career stages of workers. The *number of switches* between different types of labour market positions during the observation period was added since switching between labour market positions can be a strategy to stay in the sector and a characteristic of protean careers. The total number of transitions is calculated by comparing the type of labour market position in a given month (t) to the type of labour market position in the previous month (t-1). If they do not match, this is counted as a transition. The added score of the total number of transitions during the observation period is the resulting variable added to the analyses. Finally, the sub-sector of the CCI in which the workers were located in January 2010 is added to the analyses.

Results

Description of the cohort in January 2010

Table 2 shows the characteristics of the cohort of workers that forms the basis of the analyses: all workers between 18 and 65 years of age with earnings from works in the CCI in January 2010. The final two columns reflect worker characteristic in January 2010 (beginning of the observation period) and December 2019 (end of the observation period). In January 2010, most workers held a permanent contract (37.7%), followed by solo self-employed workers (21.6%). The smallest group exists of employers (9.0%). By December 2019, 12.0% of the cohort had reached pension age and another 46.8% left the CCI for other reasons. Of those that remain, most are solo self-employed workers by the end of 2019 (18.1%), followed by those holding a permanent contract (12.0%). This means that over the course of 10 years a majority of people that used to work in the sector left.

In terms of earnings, most workers belonged to the category of having marginal earnings at the beginning of 2010 (44.9%). The second largest category consisted of workers with lower earnings (23.5%), whereas much smaller groups belonged to the category of having higher earnings (19.2%) or the highest earnings (12.4%). By the end of 2019, the largest group of workers no longer has earnings from the CCI since they left the sector or reached pension age. From the remaining group, the earnings seem to have polarised: the two largest groups can be found at the lower end (13.4%) and upper end (12.1%) of the earnings spectrum.

More than half of the cohort is male (56.8%) in January 2010 rising to 58.3 percent by the end of 2019, indicating that women left the CCI more frequently than men. In January

Table 2. Descriptive statistics January 2010 cohort.

Variable	Category	Beginning of 2010 (proportion/ mean) (S.D.)	End of 2019 (proportion/ mean) (S.D.)
Labour market position	*Permanent contract*	37.7%	12.0%
	Temporary contract	14.1%	1.6%
	Employer	9.0%	2.9%
	Solo self employed	21.6%	18.1%
	Multiple jobholder	17.7%	6.7%
	Left the CCI	N.A.	46.8%
	Reached pension age	N.A.	12.0%
Earning level	*Marginal earnings*	44.9%	13.4%
	Lower earnings	23.5%	7.6%
	Higher earnings	19.2%	8.1%
	High earnings	12.4%	12.1%
Sex	*Male*	56.8%	58.3%
	Female	43.2%	41.7%
Migration background	*No*	81.9%	83.1%
	Yes	18.1%	17.3%
Age		39.4 (11.5)	48.5 (8.9)
Educational level	*Practical*	4.9%	3.1%
	Applied	19.9%	17.5%
	Theoretical	46.0%	50.4%
	Unknown	29.2%	29.0%
Number of switches		1.9 (4.1)	2.1 (5.1)
Sub-sector	*PR & communication*	10.2%	2.0%
	Architecture	4.8%	7.5%
	Advertising agencies	22.9%	23.4%
	Industrial design	17.4%	4.4%
	Publishing activities	4.4%	13.9%
	TV & film	6.9%	10.6%
	Photography	1.7%	5.5%
	Practice of performing arts	7.6%	10.2%
	Producers of performing arts	8.5%	2.3%
	Support performing arts	1.2%	6.9%
	Artistic creation	3%	10.7%
	Cultural learning & archives	0.5%	1.4%
	Museum	9.7%	3.1%
	Historical sites	2.8%	0.5%

2010, the average age within the cohort was 39 and about 18.1 percent had a migration background. This shrank to 17.3 percent in December 2019, reflecting that workers with a migration background left more often than others although the difference is not that large. The large majority working in the sector has a high level of education (46%). The fact that this increased to over 50 percent in December 2019 means that they also stick around more often in the sector. On average, workers switched 1.9 times between labour market positions in the 10 years of observation, which includes switches between employment and leaving the sector. The variation is substantial, however, with a standard deviation of 4.1. The number is slightly higher in December 2019, meaning that those that stayed switched their type of labour market position within the CCI more often than those that left.

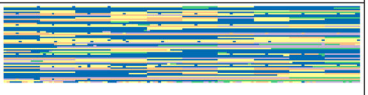
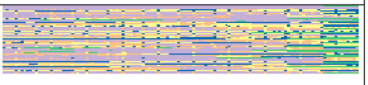
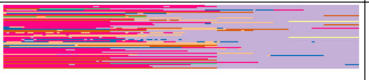
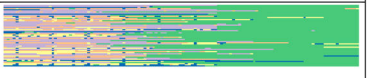
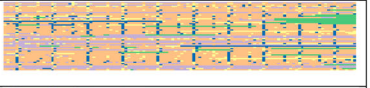
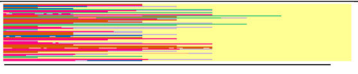
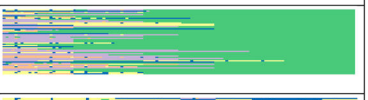
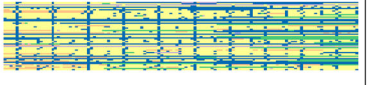
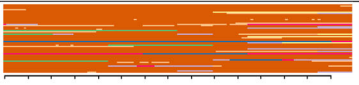
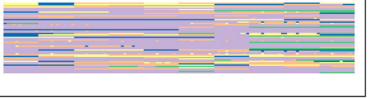
In January 2010, most workers were located in the sub-sector "advertising agencies' (22.9%), followed by "industrial design" (17.4%) and "PR and communications' (10.2%). The division of the remaining workers in December 2019 between the subsectors shows a different picture. "Advertising agencies' still contains the majority of the workers (23.4%), but "industrial design" now only contains 4.4 percent of the workers and "PR and communication" 2.0 percent. This shows that many of the original

workers in January 2010 have exited these sectors by the end of the 10-year observation period. The sectors in which workers stayed during the observation window were "publishing activities', "TV & film", "practice of performing arts' and "artistic creation". The sub-sectors where workers remain are thus also the sub-sectors that belong to the arts.

Work-trajectories in the CCI

The multichannel sequence analysis resulted in an optimal solution of eight different clusters of work trajectories present among the studied cohort. The visualised clusters with short names and descriptions and presented in Table 3. The last two columns show the

Table 3. Clusters of career trajectories observed among the January 2010 cohort in the CCI, seqiplots.

	Cluster name	Prop. of total	Career trajectories individual workers: Labour market positions	Career trajectories individual workers: Earnings
			Having left the CCI Solo self employed Permanent contract Pension age Multiple jobholder Employer Temporary contract	No income from the CCI Marginal earnings Lower earnings Higher earnings High earnings
			Jan 2010 → Dec 2019	Jan 2010 → Dec 2019
1	Employers with higher earnings	4%		
2	Multiple job holders	6%		
3	Leaving after a while	16%		
4	Leaving quickly	31%		
5	Tenure, lower earnings	8%		
6	Reaching pension age	6%		
7	Tenure, higher earnings	8%		
8	Solo self-employed with lower earnings	20%		

visualisation (seqiplots) of the career-trajectories of those belonging to the cluster in terms of labour market position (before last column) and earnings (last column). Each line is a work trajectory of an individual worker in the sector between January 2010 until December 2019. The drips in the earnings-plots reflect the effect of end-of-the-year bonuses and holiday allowances.

The largest cluster (number 4) contains workers that leave the sector early in the observation period (31%), but also the cluster with workers that leave the sector after a while (number 3) is substantial (16%). As the cohort is also left-censored these differences in timing may not reflect real differences. Work trajectories of these two clusters can therefore be interpreted as belonging to the same group of trajectories: those of workers who left the industry during the observation period for reasons other than having reached retirement age. Workers from all different earning categories seem to be present in these two clusters, but the groups with marginal earnings and low earnings are overrepresented (see colour distribution in the final column of Table 3). This is an indication that the earning levels might drive these workers to employment outside the CCI. However, interestingly enough many of these workers had a permanent contract before leaving the sector. What the seqi plots show is that generally workers of these clusters did not return after having left the CCI during the observation window.

The second largest cluster (number 8) is characterised by solo self-employed workers (20%). Although some workers with higher or high earnings can be found in this cluster, the majority have marginal or low earnings (as shown by the colour distribution of the plots in the final column of Table 3), indicating that precarious self-employed workers are more common in the CCI than high-earning entrepreneurs. Solo self-employed workers tend to remain in the CCI throughout the observation period and are less likely to leave the sector than employees. This suggests that this type of labour market position makes it easier to stay in the sector. However, the results of the multichannel sequence analysis do not show a large-scale shift from being employees to becoming solo self-employed during the ten-year observation period. The growth in self-employment in the CCI in the Netherlands appears to result not from employees switching to self-employment, but from new entrants to the sector being more frequently self-employed.

There are two cluster of work trajectories that are characterised by permanent contracts (number 5 & 7) and each contains 8% of the workers in the sample. They are distinct in terms of earning-levels: cluster 5 contains workers with lower earnings throughout the observation period, whereas cluster 7 contains workers with consistent high(er) earnings in the 10 years of observation. Apparently, there are still two distinct groups of workers on permanent contracts in the sector, those with high earning work trajectories and those with work trajectories on lower income levels, even though the general image of the sector is of one in which everybody works on flexible contracts. Apparently, the workers on permanent contracts tend to be overlooked in discussion on the CCI. The argument for not including them in the discussion for the reason that their working conditions are not precarious might not hold, since for about half of these workers their work trajectories are characterised by lower-than-average earnings. The remaining clusters are characterised by those reaching pension age (number 6), employers with high earnings (number 1) and multiple job holders (number 2). In general, earning levels resulting from their position in the CCI tend to be low for this last group of workers. This could

Table 4. Multinominal logistic regression analyses with clusters as the dependent variables (Exp(B); 95% confidence interval).

		Cluster 1	Cluster 2	Cluster 3	Cluster 4	Cluster 5	Cluster 6	Cluster 7	Cluster 8
		Employers	*Multiple job holders*	*Leaving after a while*	*Leaving quickly*	*Tenure, lower earnings*	*Reaching pension age*	*Tenure, higher earnings*	*Solo self-employed with lower earnings*
Migration background	*No*	Ref	Ref	Ref	Ref	Ref	Ref	Ref	Ref
	Yes	0.803 (0.687-0.938)**	0.819 (0.722-0.929)	0.995 (1.906-1.092)	1.182 (1.091-1.281)**	0.763 (0.675-1.863)**	0.889 (0.606-1.306)	0.815 (0.720-0.923)**	Ref
Sex	*Male*	Ref	Ref	Ref	Ref	Ref	Ref		Ref
	Female	0.376 (0.328-0.430)**	1.007 (0.913-1.110)**	1.305 (1.212-1.405)**	1.197 (1.121-1.278)**	1.307 (1.191-1.433)**	0.992 (0.748-1.316)**	0.651 (0.591-0.717)**	Ref
Age		1.018 (1.012-1.024)**	0.001 (0.995-1.006)	0.984 (0.980-0.988)**	0.949 (0.946-0.952)**	0.954 (0.949-0.959)**	10.730 (9.032-12.747)**	0.994 (0.989-0.999)*	
Edu. level	*Low*	Ref	Ref	Ref	Ref	Ref	Ref	Ref	Ref
	Middle	1.505 (0.950-2.384)*	0.995 (0.748-1.324)	0.601 (0.500-0.722)**	0.590 (0.496-0.702)**	0.667 (0.528-0.842)**	0.678 (0.386-1.193)	1.061 (0.789-1.427)	Ref
	High	2.315 (1.488-3.603)**	0.925 (0.704-1.215)**	0.331 (0.278-0.396)**	0.346 (0.293-0.409)**	0.352 (0.281-0.440)**	0.666 (0.378-0.173)**	1.464 (1.104-1.940)**	Ref
	Unknown	3.655 (2.354-5.764)**	0.834 (0.632-1.101)**	0.393 (0.328-0.471)**	0.461 (0.389-0.546)**	0.785 (0.626-0.984)*	0.829 (0.504-0.1.366)**	1.729 (1.302-2.297)**	Ref
Switches		1.052 (1.034-1.071)**	1.103 (1.091-1.115)**	1.067 (1.055-1.079)**	1.059 (1.048-1.070)**	1.034 (1.019-1.050)**	1.133 (1.085-1.182)**	1.034 (1.018-1.050)**	Ref
Sub-sector	*PR & Comm.*	4.133 (0.504-33.876)	0.140 (0.050-0.392)**	0.387 (0.164-0.910)*	0.431 (0.197-0.941)*	0.048 (0.021-0.110)**	0.338 (0.050-2.275)	0.116 (0.051-0.267)**	Ref
	Architecture	4.810 (0.595-38.860)	0.244 (0.093-0.643)**	0.786 (0.3411.813)	0.978 (0.454-2.108)	0.164 (0.076-0.355)**	0.457 (0.092-2.267)	0.292 (0.132-0.644)**	Ref
	Ind. design	1.600 (0.197-13.010)	0.186 (0.071-0.487)**	0.307 (0.133-0.708)**	0.209 (0.097-0.450)**	0.013 (0.006-0.029)**	0.121 (0.022-0.673)*	0.013 (0.006-0.032)**	Ref
	adverstising	2.941 (0.366-23.623)	0.209 (0.081-0.536)**	0.281 (0.123-0.641)**	0.207 (0.097-0.444)	0.057 (0.0270.122)**	0.250 (0.051-1.216)	0.068 (0.031-0.149)**	Ref

	Publishing	5.197 (0.64142.138)	0.573 (0.219-1.493)	2.627 (1.140-6.057)*	1.406 (0.651-3.037)	0.573 (0.266-1.233)	1.566 (0.322-7.614)	1.464 (0.665-3.224)	Ref
	TV&film	1.910 (0.237-15.407)	0.198 (0.077-0.513)**	0.247 (0.108-0.568)**	0.190 (0.088-0.407)**	0.048 (0.022-0.103)**	0.181 (0.035-0.941)*	0.080 (0.036-0.176)**	Ref
	Photography	0.860 (0.106-6.994)	0.199 (0.077-0.517)**	0.131 (0.057-0.303)**	0.060 (0.028-0.130)**	0.010 (0.005-0.023)**	0.090 (0.017-0.467)**	0.010 (0.004-0.023)**	Ref
	PA practice	0.618 (0.076-5.031)	0.346 (0.124-0.890)*	0.117 (0.051-0.270)**	0.068 (0.032-0.146)**	0.020 (0.0090.044)**	0.155 (0.030-0.806)*	0.033 (0.015-0.074)**	Ref
	PA produce	1.297 (0.155-10.837)	0.371 (0.140-0.982)*	0.175 (0.074-0.417)**	0.121 (0.055-0.267)**	0.037 (0.016-0.084)**	0.125 (0.016-0.955)*	0.040 (0.017-0.096)**	Ref
	PA support	1.496 (0.184-12.138)	0.298 (0.115-0.772)*	0.247 (0.107-0.569)**	0.287 (0.133-0.616)**	0.038 (0.018-0.083)**	0.229 (0.042-1.244)	0.047 (0.021-0.106)**	Ref
	Art. Creation	0.460 (0.057-3.732)	0.209 (0.081-0.538)**	0.111 (0.048-0.255)**	0.055 (0.026-0.118)**	0.007 (0.003-0.015)**	0.100 (0.020-0.492**	0.007 (0.003-0.016)**	Ref
	Cult.&archive	3.557 (0.358-35.349)	1.683 (0.539-5.262)	2.137 (0.774-5.901)	1.209 (0.464-3.150)	1.181 (0.455-3.065)	1.746 (0.283-10.750)	1.999 (0.760-5.259)	Ref
	Museum	3.437 (0.394-29.961)	1.277 (0.460-3.547)	1.636 (0.669-4.006)	1.143 (0.499-2.621)	1.205 (0.529-2.748)	1.408 (0.261-7.593)	1.082 (0.462-2.536)	Ref
	Hist. sites	Ref	Ref	Ref	Ref	Ref	Ref	Ref	Ref
R^2	*Nagelkerke*	0.556	–	–	–	–	–	–	–

be an indication that having multiple jobs is a strategy to increase earnings so one can stay working in the CCI. Another explanation might be that this group of workers has a main job outside the sector and does the work in the CCI at the side "for fun".

Table 4 shows the relation between worker characteristics and the distinguished clusters of work trajectories based on multinominal logistic regression analyses. The explained variance by the variables in the model is 55.6 percent, meaning that together those variables do pretty well in predicting who will end up in which cluster. **Cluster 8** (solo self-employed with lower earnings) serves as the reference cluster. If we compare cluster 8 to the other clusters it becomes clear that solo self-employed workers with lower earnings tend to be relatively older than workers in other sectors. Only those belonging to cluster 1 ("employers') are older. Moreover, they switch labour market potion least of all.

Cluster 1 "employers with higher earnings' contains people that tend to be older than those in the reference cluster. A higher educational level increases the odds of ending up in this cluster. The high value for the educational category "unknown" in the result of the data collection strategy of Statistics Netherlands (see data description) and therefore does not reflect reality. Men are more likely to be part of this cluster than women as are those without a migration background. These results indicate a first structural inequality in the sector: men and those without a migration background are more likely to be employers. This inequality is not unique to the sector, but rather reflects inequalities observed in the labour market as a whole.

Cluster 2 "multiple job holders' contains workers with characteristics that are correlated with having a weaker position in the labour market: workers with a lower level of education and female workers are overrepresented in this cluster. However, having a migration back ground decrease the odds of belonging to this sector. Of all cluster, in this this cluster switch labour market positions most often (apart from those reaching pension age, which is the result of retiring being counted as a switch of labour market position). This might be the result of taking side jobs on and off during one's career indicating that multiple jobholding is a strategy to survive in the sector. Indeed, most workers in this cluster stay in the sector and do not leave it during the ten-year observation window, indicating that multiple job holding might indeed be an effective strategy. However, earnings remain low throughout the observation period. This is a clear indication that precarity persist over time.

Cluster 3 (leaving after a while) **and 4 (**leaving quickly)**,** which we interpret as one and the same cluster of those who leave the sector during the observation window, shows that younger workers and workers with a low level of education have higher odds of belonging to these clusters as are workers with a migration background and female workers. The observation that younger workers are more likely to leave suggests that the early stages of working life are the hardest to get through. Once workers have established themselves in the sector, they are more likely to stay. However, as the other clusters show, this does not always mean decent working conditions. The results of cluster 3 and 4 also show that structural inequalities observed in cross-sectional studies on the CCI, are also translated in who leaves the sector and who stays. Disadvantaged groups in the labour market leave the sector more often than other groups of workers.

Biased patterns in leaving is however not the only way structural inequalities emerge from the analysis, also the clusters with permanent contracts indicate that structural

inequalities exist in the trajectories of workers in the CCI. **Cluster 5** "tenure, lower earnings' contains workers that tend to have a lower educational level and are more often female compared to the reference cluster, whereas workers of **cluster 7 "**tenure, higher earnings' tend to be higher educated and more likely to be man. This indicates that men end up in the permanent positions with higher earnings and women in the permanent positions characterised by lower earnings. This indicates another structural inequality in the sector. **Cluster 6** "reaching pension age" unsurprisingly contains the work trajectories of older people in the sector.

Discussion and conclusion

Given that conventional measures of career success, such as securing full-time permanent employment and consistent salary growth, may not resonate with workers in the CCI, studies have advocated for more comprehensive measures (Dumford & Miller, 2017; Jackson & Bridgstock, 2019). Bridgstock (2007) argues that individuals in boundaryless or protean careers perceive their "employability level" as an indicator of success, likely meaning employability within the sector, as workers often find it hard to leave (Hennekam & Bennett, 2016). From this perspective, it is concerning that more than half of the workers in this study left the CCI during the ten-year observation period, most for reasons other than reaching pension age. High turnover rates are not unique for the sector in the Netherlands, as they are for example also reported for Australia (Brook et al., 2021) and the United States (Woronkowicz, 2015). The fact that most workers did not return to the sector might indicate they found satisfactory employment elsewhere. Nevertheless, the high attrition levels suggest a significant loss of human capital for the sector, along with a loss of many long-nurtured dreams. Moreover, marginal earnings are typically found among those who leave the sector, indicating that marginal earnings are a significant factor driving workers to exit the sector. Additionally, the fact that many workers left just after the 2008 economic crisis, combined with the fact that many of those leaving held permanent positions shows that the sector and its workers are vulnerable to external economic shocks. This vulnerability likely extends to other shocks, such as the COVID-19 crisis (Snowball & Gouws, 2022). This makes work in the sector even more vulnerable than it already is. Given the global nature of the shocks, it is likely that they have had the same effect on CCIs in other countries. In particular, the literature shows that the sector is also characterised by high and distorted turnover rates in other countries (Percival, 2020). However, more research is needed to know whether this is indeed the case.

The variety of stretches of work trajectories observed in this study shows that we may currently overestimate the prevalence of continuous patterns of flexible labour market positions in the sector and overlook the existence of more traditional work trajectories that are also there. The fact that approximately half of the observed work-trajectories characterised by a permanent contract throughout the observation period also feature earnings consistently below average, suggests that not only workers in flexible jobs may require protection and regulation of working conditions. Also workers in more stable labour market trajectories have their own issues that need addressing. This underscores the importance of recent calls to delve deeper into the complexities of precarity in the CCI (Brook et al., 2021). This may be even more urgent for other countries, as the

labour market in the Netherlands is characterised by a high degree of flexibility, which may indicate that stable labour market positions in the CCI may be even more present in other countries.

Even though stability is present in the sector, the lowest incomes are found among solo self-employed workers and multiple job holders. This is an indication that, like in other sectors, flexibilization of the labour market leads to an increase in precarious work, also in the CCI. This is interesting since the increase in self-employment is in this sector is often portraited as the result of workers seeking more autonomy and creative freedom, and thus individual choice, rather than precarization. That being said, the fact that these workers stay regardless marginal earning-levels supports the idea that passion for their profession is a key factor keeping workers in the sector (Bennett & Hennekam, 2018; Gill & Pratt, 2008; Throsby & Zednik, 2011).

The combination of the passion that holds true for large groups of workers in the sector and their long-term flexible labour market positions which were observed for many workers in this study, suggests that work trajectories in the CCI can best be described by the label "protean" (Bridgstock, 2007). The decline in permanent contracts in the sector, while workers on flexible contracts more often remain, further underscores this notion and demonstrates that this career type also most enables workers to stay in the sector. However, contrary to what is suggested in the literature, switching between different types of labour market positions is not a pervasive characteristic of such careers in the CCI in the Netherlands (Serafini & Banks, 2020; Sullivan, 1999; Throsby & Zednik, 2011). Solo self-employed workers are unlikely to transition to other types of labour market positions, whereas multiple jobholders are the most likely to do so, but only temporarily so. This suggests that multiple jobholders take on additional jobs intermittently while continuing to work in the CCI. They may do so out of necessity, as evidenced by their marginal earnings in the CCI. This contradicts the new career theory that views mobility from the perspective of individual agency (Kovalenko & Mortelmans, 2014), seeing it as a proactive strategy in the context of flexibilization (Arthur & Rousseau, 1996; Verbruggen, 2012) and a way to build a standout portfolio in the context of the CCI (Arthur & Rousseau, 1996; Gunz et al., 2007). Rather, the results support the literature that views flexibility as indicative of precarity and insecurity (Gregg, 2011; King et al., 2005; Neff, 2012).

The structural inequalities in the CCI were reflected in the work trajectories observed in this study. Even in more traditional work trajectories, characterised by permanent contracts throughout the observation period, it was observed that women tend to occupy lower-paying positions compared to men, which persists over their careers in the sector (Been et al., 2023). Furthermore, in alignment with the literature, workers with a migration background, women, and younger workers are disproportionately represented in work trajectories that lead to leaving the sector (Brook et al., 2021; Hesmondhalgh & Baker, 2015). This highlights the challenges these groups face in sustaining work in the sector, exacerbating existing inequalities. Moreover, it underscores the difficulty in establishing a foothold, as younger workers are more likely to leave the sector again, which is in line with findings in the Australian context (Brook et al., 2021).

This study has several limitations that should be considered when interpreting its implications. First, while the data provides detailed information on workers' labour

market positions and earnings, it lacks other pertinent details, such as individuals' professions or their specific orientation towards working in the CCI. Second, by focusing solely on the cohort of workers active in the CCI in January 2010, we overlook those who entered the sector thereafter. Recent entrants may have different perspectives due to changes in available types of labour market positions. Further research is necessary to assess the extent of these potential differences. Lastly, since this study is confined to the Netherlands, it remains unclear whether similar diversity in career trajectories can be observed in other countries. Nonetheless, it is plausible that similar diversity exists beyond what is superficially evident.[1]

Note

1. The language of this article has been corrected using ChatGPT, using the command 'please correct the language'. The suggestions for alteration were carefully reviewed.

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Appendix

Appendix 1: Plot to select the optimal number of clusters using the elbow method.