

GRADUATES IN THE LABOUR MARKET: EVIDENCE FROM RUSSIAN MUSIC UNIVERSITIES

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Abstract

Post graduate labour demand is an ever-present problem for youth in many countries. Russia's state statistics often does not confirm the existence of this problem and furthermore, shows high employment rates of graduates in attaining employment in their field of expertise.

The paper presents the results of research regarding the problems pertaining to employment common to Russian young opera singers after graduating from musical universities. The research revealed following problems. Firstly, major contingent of graduates are unable to completely implement professional competences received during their educational period, and as a result, a large number of graduates engaged in areas ancillary to their field of expertises. Secondly, specific conditions complicate the transition of a young professional into the labour market. Thirdly, certain factors were uncovered which effectively predetermine that young specialists withdraw from the profession.

The research allows us to make following conclusions. For developing effective methods of regulating employment in the cultural and art spheres, it is indispensable to actively introduce the practice of sample surveys into the realized market monitorings (especially in-depth interviews). We also suggest specific mechanisms for professional integration in this field.

Key words: graduate employment, young opera singers; musical education, young artists programs.

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Introduction

Graduate employability is one of the most pressing problems for young people in many countries. The youth unemployment rate is persistently significantly higher than the average unemployment rate, according to the data by Eurostat. 18.7% of active population under 25 were unemployed in the EU28 in 2016, whereas the corresponding rate for the total population was 8.6% (*Eurostat*, 2017).

Russian official statistics often does not reflect the existence of the problem showing relatively high rates of employed graduates. The results of a sample survey in 2016 by Russian Federal State Statistics Service demonstrated that only 9.5% of graduates were unable to find a job. However, the same survey stated that about a third of graduates in Russia have a job unrelated with the training they received at university (*Federal, 2016*). Results of social surveys conducted among graduates reveal even a more deplorable picture: only 17% of graduates of one of Russian conservatories make their living by what they had been taught in their educational institution (Krylova & Orekhova, 2013). According to the Russian Public Opinion Research Center (VCIOM), about a half of Russians (47%) believe that it has become harder for graduates to get a job corresponding to their major (*Results of, 2017*).

Definitely, there are common factors that influence the level of graduate employment. For instance, Baldry (2016) researched the influence of demographic and educational characteristics of South African graduates on their employment/unemployment status. Macakova (2013) described the position of graduates in the Czech labour market and explored the impact of the economic crisis, including rising unemployment, on the situation of university graduates in the labour market. Ren, Zhu and Warner (2015) investigated how changes in formal and informal institutions affect the employment of university graduates in a fast-changing labour market in China.

However, the reasons for a lack of desire or opportunity to find a major-related job, as well as the reasons for quickly quitting the job, might differ from one sphere of employment to another. Indeed, the rate of unemployed graduates in 2016 varied from 2.3% in the sphere of aerospace engineering to 17.5% in the area of social studies, according to the official Russian statistics (*Federal, 2016*). Over (1981) showed that pass graduates in psychology seeking immediate employment face strong competition for generalist positions from graduates in other disciplines. Whitelegg (1981) studied the employment patterns of geography graduates. One study found that, unlike technical graduates, liberal arts graduates usually encounter difficulty finding jobs in their majors. A substantial percentage of such graduates face the problem of unemployment or part-time employment (Zeid, et al., 2015). Another study identified specific problems experienced by graduates of the Master of Education, Gerontology Option program (Rueb, Weber, & Hesser, 1994).

The aim of our research is to analyse the position of music university graduates in the labour market and explore the reasons for graduates' quitting their major-related jobs.

In the process of our study, we did not pursue the aim to provide the detailed method of solving the identified problems. However, we deemed it necessary to express the authors'

position on this account and show the direction in which, in our opinion, measures aimed at solving the problems faced by musical university graduates should be developed.

1 Data and Methods

Both formalized and non-formalized research methods were used to identify the distinctive features of music university graduates' position in the labour market. Namely, we have conducted the following empiric studies:

1. In-depth interviews with recognized specialists in the field, as well as those who quit their jobs. In the course of the interviews we tried to work out the main difficulties faced by music university graduates in the labour market and the reasons making them change their occupation. The study was carried out from June to September 2016.

2. Research with a group of young opera singers, with a total of 75 participants who have graduated from Russian music universities. The majority of our respondents (73%) are professional singers aged 25 to 35. According to the expert estimation, these years are believed to be the formative ones for opera singers. This study was carried out in October - November 2016. The data were collected using questionnaires which included questions whether the respondents had enough knowledge and skills to work in opera independently, and whether graduates needed additional internship upon graduation (in particular, participation in young artist programs by major opera houses). SPSS 22.0 was used to process and analyze the data.

2 Results

We obtained the following results through our research.

1. The analysis of the in-depth interviews allowed to identify the key reasons why opera singer leave their occupation. Those include:

- a lack of stage experience: ("A young vocalist who has recently graduated from the conservatory needs a tutor. As it happens to be, there are no tutors in opera houses. So there is no-one to help a young singer");

- unstable position of a young singer both in the opera troupe and in the young artist program ("I was offered a job in the opera house. I moved there with my family, but in 6 months my contract was broken in the middle of the theatrical season without a word of warning. I found myself in a strange city, unable to find a job related to my major");

- a lack of confidence in one's own capabilities ("The experience just is not enough. I was entrusted with a large part. Even the first rehearsal got me thinking: will I make it to the end of the performance?");

- a low salary of a beginning opera singer;

- a high barrier a young opera singer needs to overcome to join the troupe ("Nowadays the market of opera singers is glutted. It is more beneficial to take on an already accomplished lead singer than to train a beginner. The young ones get stuck with small parts, and that's it, the end of the career for most of them").

The above mentioned difficulties faced by young opera singers prevent most of them from fully realising the professional competence formed during the years of studies. Dissatisfied with small parts, beginning opera singers switch to paraprofessional occupations such as variety art, tutoring, teaching.

2. The results of the in-depth interviews have also shown some features of how modern opera houses work with beginning specialists. For example, it is more common to invite outsiders to sing the leading parts, while the troupe members are not fully engaged into the repertoire.

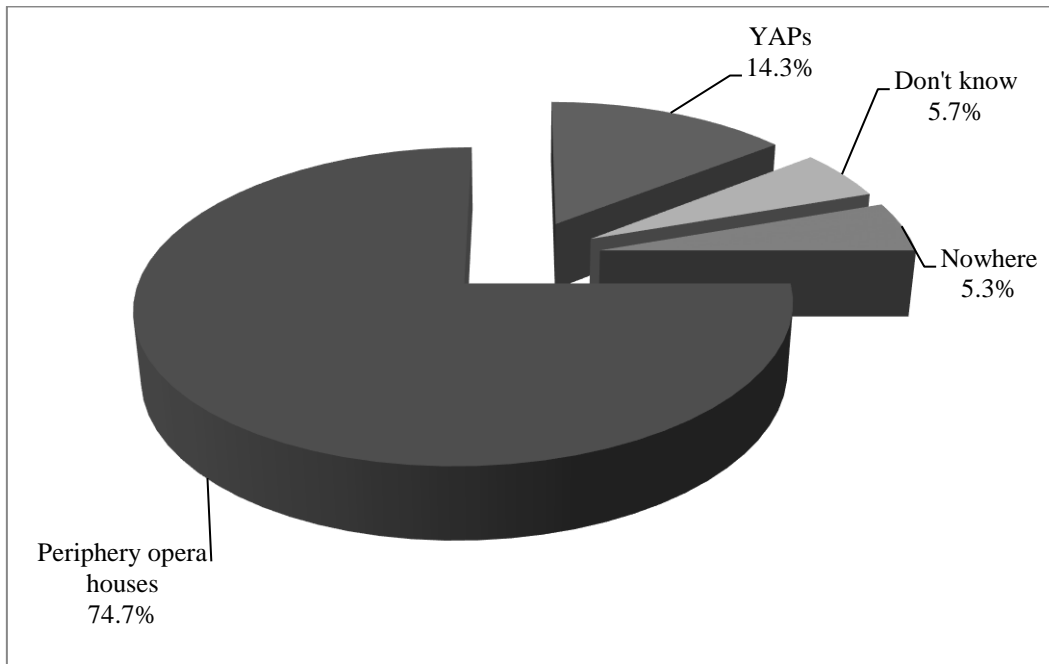
3. The survey among music university graduates demonstrated that the majority (75%) lacks knowledge and practical skills to start working on the opera stage. At the same time, the prevailing number of the respondents (80%) believe that graduates need an additional internship upon graduation in order to build a successful professional career.

4. A substantial part of the respondents note that work in chamber theatres in the capital or periphery could be an alternative for the internship (Fig. 1).

As a rule, it is in such theatres that a young singer does not have to wait long for larger parts. Moreover, in the opinion of our respondents, young singers get more attention in chamber theatres, which allows to offset the challenges of the adaptation period at the start of the professional career.

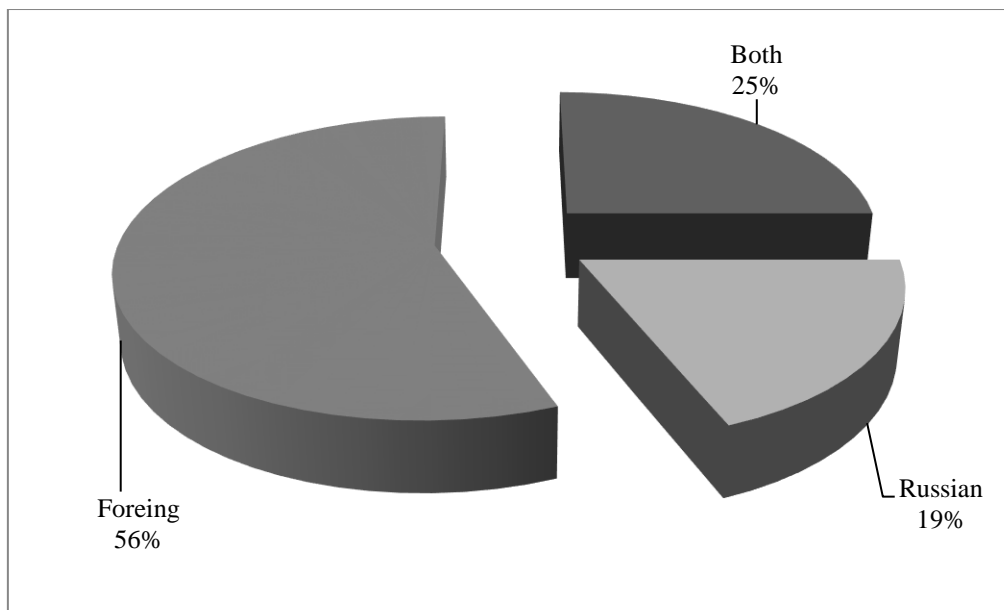
5. Taking part in young artist programs by major opera houses was considered viable by 15% of the respondents. The majority of people favoring young artist programs preferred foreign ones to Russian ones (Fig. 2).

Fig. 1: The breakdown of the answers to the question where the music university graduates preferred to have an internship upon graduation.



Source: data of the survey

Fig. 2: The breakdown of the answers to the question which young artist programs music university graduates preferred to take part in.



Source: data of the survey

3 Discussions

1. A lack of knowledge and practical skills, as well as a lack of confidence in one's own capabilities, which is typical of music university graduates, allow for a conclusion that theatres have a need for special structures designed to help young singers through their first professional steps. There are several structures of this type in the world practice: Young Artists Program (YAP), Opernstudio, internship groups, young singer academies, etc.

2. The results of the research showed that a part of music university graduates deem it expedient to start their career with participation in young artist programs. Despite the differences in practices of such programs in various countries, they are aimed at a common goal: to prepare a singer to be fully integrated in an opera house. For that purpose, in the course of the programs graduates have classes with different coaches, practise entering the stage with smaller parts and as covers for larger parts (in case the main singer cannot perform). However, a vast number of our respondents prefer to take part in young artist programs abroad. The reasons accounting for this may vary from the opportunity to get knowledge and stage experience that Russian vocal school cannot provide to the opportunity to enroll into a foreign theatre troupe.

At the moment, few Russian theatres have their own young artist programs, however, until 90s of the last century opera houses used to have so-called internship groups through which came all the conservatory graduates admitted to the troupe.

3. The results of our research showed that the major part of music university graduates prefer to start their careers in chamber theatres in the capital or periphery, where the adaptation period at the start of the professional development is far easier. The in-depth interviews enabled us to form a concept of working practice of beginning singers in one of the Russian theatres – St. Petersburg Opera chamber theatre. The following is typical of working practice in the theatre: one day an artist can enter the stage with the lead part, the next day – with a smaller one, the following day – as the supernumerary. Such practice encourages professional growth of young artists. Every singer is given the opportunity of creative growth and development from small parts to leading ones in a short period of time. Also, the theatre has a developed concert practice that includes both gala concerts with the orchestra and various chamber programs accompanied with piano. Involvement in concerts, especially at first, when a singer has not yet accustomed to the repertoire and does not often enter the stage, enables beginners to stay in good shape for vocals. Besides, it is an opportunity to better familiarize with the hall's acoustics and one of the first chances for beginning artists to work with the orchestra. According to the

internal managerial accounting system of St. Petersburg Opera theatre, singers working for it at different times continued their careers on the stages of Russian theatres such as the Novosibirsk Opera and Ballet Theatre, Mikhailovsky, Mariinsky and Bolshoi theatres. Ex-lead singers of the chamber theatre now work in opera houses in Dusseldorf, Zurich and Mannheim.

4. Taking into account the specifics of work in modern opera houses (by which we mean the practice of inviting outsiders), it can be supposed that successful integration of young opera singers into their profession would benefit both graduates and their employers. Indeed, the employers could strengthen their troupes and avoid spending excessive amounts of money on invited lead singers if they paid attention to postgraduate training and adaptation of young opera singers and prepared them for larger opera parts.

Conclusion

The conducted research allowed us to make the following conclusions.

Firstly, the data on employment of music university graduates presented in the Russian official statistics does not reflect the state of the market in this area to a full extent and, as a rule, overestimates the number of graduates who are employed according to their major. In order to devise effective measures regulating employment in the field of culture and arts, it is indispensable to actively introduce the practice of sample surveys into the realized market monitoring (especially in-depth interviews).

Secondly, successful integration of young opera singers into the job is not only the matter of interest to graduates, but to employers as well. The integration mechanisms described in the article require active participation of both interested parties.

Thirdly, formation of internship groups at the theatres and active engagement of music university graduates in so-called young artists programs or opera studios can be seen as the most efficient mechanisms of postgraduate adaptation.

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