

The Show Must Go On: Professional Magicians in Lockdown

The arts and culture scene fears for its existence. Artists who make their livelihood performing live are going without income. A study by Prof. Dr. Carsten Baumgarth uncovers the current situation.

Since March 2020, the corona pandemic and the related restrictions has hit many industries hard. The true extent of the economic consequences in general and the psychological effects on people are currently not yet foreseeable. The arts and culture scene in particular is directly threatened by the crisis. Without performances, live artists have no income.

Prof. Dr. Carsten Baumgarth, Professor of Marketing at the Berlin School of Economics and Law (HWR Berlin), has investigated the situation of professional magicians in Germany. The scientific study shows that in 2020, artists lost around 83 percent of their income compared to the previous year.

Estimates suggest that there are around 300 to 500 professional magicians in Germany. More than 180 of them took part in the interviews and the online survey. They do not expect their situation to recover until 2022. What survival strategies have the artists of magic developed in the Corona crisis to defy this situation that threatens their existence?

In the first pandemic phase from March to April 2020 and in the second lockdown from May to October 2020, study participants tried to survive the crisis in particular by reducing private and professional expenses, drawing on financial aid from the federal government, and relying on their own savings and loans.

In the third phase, starting in November 2020, these strategies continue to be pursued, but they become less effective. The focus therefore shifts toward innovation, such as magic in online formats. Zoom shows for individuals and digital corporate events, among others, are now being offered. Other magicians see no alternative for themselves and choose to exit the scene altogether, returning to former professions or learning a new one, working part-time or full-time outside of magic and culture.

Prof. Dr. Carsten Baumgarth, who initiated and conducted the study with the support of the Magic Circle of Germany (MZvD), wants to focus attention on this "small" culture and art industry, exemplary for live art or performance art.

Because of the solo independence of most artists, the small market size of this art branch as well as the loose degree of organization, the "branch" of magic art and other areas of live art hardly take place in the public and political discussion around saving and future of culture. "Even if culture is not one of the system-relevant professions according to the various lists, it is existential for a society. Because without art and culture, even after the pandemic, life is just gray not only for those affected, but also for society," says Baumgarth.

The author of the study has himself been an amateur magician for over 30 years and is a member of the MZvD, the national association of magicians in Germany, which has existed since 1912.

The complete study can be found on the website www.cbaumgarth.net. Prof. Dr. Carsten Baumgarth is available for background discussions, arranging contacts to magicians and interviews.

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