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Strategic Decisions to Enhance the Internationalization of the Performing Arts and Their Sustainability: The Case of Flamenco

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Abstract: Determining how to operate in foreign markets is challenging for the performing arts (PA) because the particular nature of their activities necessarily entails sustainable complexities. This study aims to extend understanding of the internationalization of PA to shed light on the strategic decisions adopted by cultural agents to achieve an economic and cultural objective—generating international income while ensuring the symbolic value of cultural products rooted in local values. A longitudinal empirical case of one leading enterprise in international flamenco production with a successful history in international markets is reported here, and in-depth insights into four strategic decisions that can boost the sustainable internationalization of PA are gained: why (motivations), what (product), where (market selection), and how (entry modes). The results have theoretical and practical implications for a cultural sector with few examples of internationalization that is seeking for international markets to become sustainable while being subject to public financing cuts, strong competition, and globalization. The important role of intermediaries in bridging the gaps between different actors of the PA value chain and in assuring sustainable cultural management of the internationalization process is also identified.

Keywords: firm internationalization; cultural sustainability; performing arts; strategic decisions; sustainable cultural management

1. Introduction

Cultural industries are in a strategic position to promote economic growth, job creation, and social cohesion [1–3]. Moreover, culture is the fourth pillar of sustainable development, and ensuring the continued existence of cultural industries is important [4]. Many cultural activities are struggling to survive, acquire financial sustainability, and develop effective strategies without compromising artistic integrity and values [5]. Cultural sustainability is primarily concerned with ensuring the continuity of cultural values that link the past, present, and future, while still maintaining economic sustainability [6].

Cultural industries are also a key element in global competition whose potential is still not strategically exploited abroad [7,8]. The focus of cultural industry has traditionally been local, but this has gradually changed in the past few decades, with a progressive increase of its international orientation [9]. The benefits derived from the internationalization of cultural activities are many: international income, country brand image, tourism attractiveness, innovation and collaboration, the development of cultural life, etc. Internationalization has become increasingly important to the competitiveness of cultural industries in general, and the performing arts (PA) in particular [10]. Internationalization is often proposed as a strategy for the PA, as an economic sector, to increase revenue and thus overcome the financial sustainability problems of many organizations in the sector [11,12]. Internationalization may also enhance the reputation of PA companies in their domestic markets, thus

enabling them to achieve better economic performance. At the same time, globalization has generated new challenges and new demands on these organizations [11]—the expansion of American culture [13] and the loss of identity and local values—all of which impact sustainable development.

Understanding how to operate in foreign markets is challenging for the PA because their operations are substantially different from other activities [14], and the main questions concerning the internationalization of PA resonate with sustainability matters. For instance, how to transmit a product with high symbolic content that is tightly tied to local values and high variable costs to international audiences, and how to preserve the values of local communities while generating international income. Indeed, the world of PA is intensely competitive, and competing in the best-reputed theaters around the world with many other PA genres requires more than just offering a quality product [15]. Performing a show in other countries can be difficult (e.g., the difficulty of transmitting a product with high symbolic content that is tightly tied to local values and high variable costs), and the process necessarily implies complexities and risks that deserve to be explored in a scholarly manner. It is acknowledged that globalization generates both opportunities and threats to culture. However, existing knowledge about the factors that make internationalization of the PA easier or more difficult is scarce; there is a paucity of information in the international business and cultural management literature on how cultural activities are internationalized.

It is legitimate to investigate the criteria that facilitate the internationalization of PA in order to feed the sustainability debate. How do you boost the export potential of cultural industries and guarantee their ability to benefit from international cultural trade while minimizing the negative impacts of globalization on the cultural values of a society? How do you ensure the authenticity of cultural values and, at the same time, the economic sustainability of the organization through international business practices?

Considering the difficulties of PA in balancing economic performance with the product's artistic value [16,17], it is valid to question whether some characteristics of these activities make their management challenging and limit their internationalization process and performance. For example, internationalization of the PA may be mediated by intermediaries that help bridge gaps between PA artists and international venues or audiences, so exploring how these difficulties are actually overcome by these PA agents is important.

Exploring the international strategic decisions taken by performing arts agents addresses a significant gap in the sustainable cultural management literature, as these cultural organizations strive to improve their relevance to multiple stakeholders.

Therefore, analyzing the internationalization strategies of cultural industries under the prism of cultural sustainability is of great interest and will help in the identification of sustainable business models, strengthen the viability of these microfirms, and improve the working conditions of the independent artists–workers.

To do so, the research focuses on a practical case study, flamenco, a PA subsector that has become quite dynamic in the international landscape of Spanish PA over the past 20 years. This artistic manifestation has not exploited all of its international potential, however, so examining what Spanish flamenco agents are doing to overcome the barriers to internationalization and finding out which factors are limiting their international potential is important. Specifically, the longitudinal empirical case investigates one leading enterprise in international flamenco production and illustrates the strategy it has utilized while creating markets for flamenco over the past two decades. Reflecting on international business theories and cultural management literature allows for advanced understanding of the complex internationalization of PA activities. Therefore, the logic of practice–theory interactions was used to understand the international strategic decisions flamenco agents adopt to generate new knowledge to guide the international strategic decisions of PA managers. Being a case of success, in which a sustainable internationalization strategy that resolved the supposed dichotomy between cultural and economic objects was achieved, it is a clear example of an internationalization strategy falling under the umbrella of sustainable cultural management.

Cultural industries are attracting increasing attention as hubs of managerial innovation [18], but their internationalization has not been studied up until now. This paper contributes to the understanding of the international strategic decisions deployed by cultural agents to ensure the sustainable internationalization of flamenco and to maintain a thriving international PA sector in general. Because of this, as far as we know, it is the first to introduce internationalization strategy into sustainability of the performing arts industries.

2. Theoretical Framework: Internationalization Process, Strategic Decisions and Sustainable Challenges

Researchers have long been interested in explaining the behavior of companies that navigate international markets. The so-called economic approach tries to explain the existence of the multinational company, such as the Theory of Transaction Costs [19] and the Eclectic Paradigm [20]. A second group of contributions are framed in a gradualist approach known as the Uppsala model that defines internationalization as a sequential process in which companies acquire experimental knowledge about external markets to increase their level of commitment to those markets [21].

Other relevant research streams have emerged in the field of internationalization: models based on the theory of resources and capabilities and dynamic managerial capabilities [22,23], the International Networks approach [24,25], or that which has emerged from the literature on international entrepreneurship for so-called “Born Global” companies, i.e., firms that, from inception, have a strong intent to rapidly enter and serve multiple international markets [26].

All these existing International Business theories, which might help to frame decision-making practices, are mainly drawn from a manufacturing-focused empirical ground, so that they fail to fully explain what happens in the service sector, and several authors demand the development of new theories, based on the distinctive characteristics of each activity, in order to explain and predict the international behavior of service companies [27,28].

The performing arts sector is made up of small companies, so the international entrepreneurship approach could be appropriate for this sector as posited by [15]. Research into international entrepreneurship has paid particular attention to entrepreneurs’ characteristics that favor rapid introduction from the outset, such as global vision and motivation to enter international markets [29]. International entrepreneurs have managerial and international competences, such as abundant social capital and networks [30], proactive personalities, and propensity for risk-taking. International ventures that survive early internationalization show an international entrepreneurial orientation combined with market orientation [31]. However, as has been explained in previous paragraphs, the scope of performing arts companies is usually local, so it is to be expected that their internationalization follows a sequential process, and after developing in domestic markets, they expand abroad. We therefore assume that the Uppsala approach may be appropriate to explain the factors that enable companies in this cultural subsector to take advantage of their internationalization potential. It posits that internationalization creates a shock inside enterprises, because it requires them to develop new processes and routines to operate in markets with rules and values that differ from those in their domestic markets [32]. For example, a phenomenon called “liability of foreignness” (i.e., an increase in the investment and cost of competing in external markets) occurs when enterprises must adapt their products to meet the local demand, search for new distribution channels or establish new relations. Accumulated international market knowledge helps to reduce the liability of foreignness and influences country market and entry mode selection, thus driving internationalization.

Over time, this has evolved into a more general approach to strategic decision making. The updated Uppsala model, revised to reflect the changing business landscape since 1977 [33–35], proposes a business network model of the internationalization process, focused on the entrepreneurial dimension of internationalization, which is manifested in the recognition of opportunities and the interplay of learning, creating opportunities and building trust with partners. In addition to emphasizing the cost of the liability of foreignness due to the psychic distance, the updated version gives priority

to the influence of the liability of outsidership, related to the difficulties of being part of relevant business networks.

The sequential model remains an important paradigm for internationalization [36,37] and has been applied to explain the internationalization of cultural activities that have changed their business model to fully exploit the advantages of internationalization in terms of scale economies, such as music, film, and television production [38]. In PA, the well-known examples of musicals produced in London's West End and New York City's Broadway adopt a sequential internationalization model: After their presentation in the domestic market, they use similar entry modes to those of manufacturing, licensing the intellectual property rights or exporting (touring) or investing in the foreign market by producing the same musical with local partners. These musicals are offered by commercial theatrical productions in large-scale and capital-intensive productions [39] that move from "high culture" to creative entertainment industries. Still, in general, the main internationalization track of PA is the exporting of the "original product"; that is, many artists still travel abroad for individual shows or touring.

The questions then become whether the costs of entry into foreign markets (liabilities of foreignness and outsidership) are exacerbated from the distinctive characteristics of PA, what role intermediaries play in the internationalization process, and which criteria PA agents use when making choices in their international strategic decisions: why (motivation), what (product), where (market selection), and how (directly or using intermediaries).

As motivations for internationalization differ, so too do the commitment to the foreign market, the set goals, and the strategies developed. These motivations are related to the perception of the drivers and challenges of international markets. The suitability of the product, the external demand and stimulus to go abroad (e.g., specific public financing), the availability of resources, and the personal motivation of the entrepreneur are the main drivers that motivate companies to go abroad and to boost internationalization in their business strategy [40]. The lack of knowledge and resources to overcome the liabilities of foreignness and outsidership often leads to a lack of international vision and a passive attitude toward foreign markets. As such, having motivation and global vision is already a driver, an important resource to ensure international success. Although it is commonly expected that PA agents strive for artistic reputation and business success [15,41], this study questions whether divergences may arise in the motivations and visions of internationalization among different agents of the value chain, which may generate conflicts and, at times, a weaker performance in international markets.

Because the symbolic value of a cultural product may be tightly tied to local cultural frameworks, it is difficult to predict how this value will evolve for audiences outside the culture of origin, that is, whether the value of the product will suffer a "cultural discount" [42] during internationalization. Depending on whether international audiences value authenticity or familiarity, innovation or tradition, artists and cultural managers may need to adapt the products, affecting the ease with which they are internationalized. The traditional internationalization dilemma between product standardization and adaptation to each market especially holds for cultural products, and it is necessary to reflect on how different decisions about the product to be exported are more or less sustainable, as homogenization may eliminate the symbolic value of the cultural product, turning it into an entertainment product.

Traditionally, market selection is one of the basic decisions of the internationalization process of any enterprise. The availability of resources and motivations conditions the capacity to go from one market to another. The hurdles of geographic, psychic, and cultural distance may advise a sequential approach to market selection, beginning with markets that are close to the domestic one, while other characteristics of the PA product (e.g., their short life, the small size of a specific market) may resonate more with an international entrepreneurship approach [15].

Finally, do performing companies have the necessary resources and capabilities to undertake the responsibilities of developing an international strategy? Because of their small size and focus on artistic matters, it is unlikely that these companies have international market expertise. Small enterprises created around one or several artists, as are most PA enterprises, have relatively few resources to

devote to internationalization—that is, to generate experimental knowledge about outside markets and to coordinate the agents involved in the internationalization process. Some intermediaries in the industry, such as international producers or agents, can provide the entrepreneurial and functional structure to boost the internationalization process of PA [43]. Therefore, this study aims to address the following research questions examining the internationalization of an international flamenco producer, applying a longitudinal extreme case study approach.

- Which specific strategic choices can boost the internationalization level in the case of flamenco PA?
- What common barriers encountered by flamenco agents because of the distinctive characteristics of PA limit internationalization?
- What is the role of intermediaries in developing a sustainable internationalization strategy of flamenco PA that satisfies the objectives of the different stakeholders?

3. Methodology

To answer these questions, inductive qualitative methods are considered particularly, because they offer a deep immersion in an international flamenco producer over time, allowing to gather a rich mix of data, which can provide insightful explanations about international strategic decisions taken by performing arts agents that are difficult to identify or measure through quantitative methods [44]. A longitudinal single case study was used [45] to gain rich and detailed data of the understudied phenomenon. A single case study is useful in revealing organizational aspects that have been inaccessible, and longitudinal investigation provides information about recent and recurrent events, providing in-depth understanding instead of single snapshots of firms [46]. The possibility of generalization from a specific case may raise some concerns about case study research, but authors such as those of [47,48] question these so-called limitations and describe how good case studies can be extremely valuable in social sciences. Strategic selection and literature enfoldment can increase the generalization of case studies, as the authors of [49] point out, and as we have done here. Indeed, we purposefully selected an extreme case of success, since to the best of our knowledge, no other flamenco international intermediary has had such an active and stable role in the internationalization of flamenco. Based on that, our purpose is to provide a thick description of the specific criteria in strategic decisions in the flamenco PA for inductive-base theorizing on this topic [50].

3.1. The Context

Flamenco is part of the Spanish cultural legacy and has high recognition around the world. It is a universal form of artistic expression [51], designated as intangible cultural heritage in 2010 [52]. According to [12], flamenco is a specialized autochthonous product of Andalusia (where most artistic creation occurs), with few equivalents, and therefore has little outside competition from a creative standpoint (despite the presence of flamenco artists born and trained in local schools in countries such as the United States and Japan). As flamenco is a cultural and artistic phenomenon which originated among the lower social classes, whose members were often illiterate, and has traditionally been passed on orally, artistic training and creation have largely been informal (without normative training in most cases). The sector is rather characterized by small companies, linked to one artist.

3.2. Selection of the Enterprise

For this study, a Spanish international producer company, with 20 years of experience in tours and flamenco festivals, which is a global benchmark in the internationalization of flamenco, was selected and is referred to here as “FF”. FF’s business model has been to promote the internationalization of renowned flamenco artists by selling varied and innovative entry modes, such as the production of flamenco festivals in New York and London and world tours in 101 cities around the world (see Table 1). Its long history of success, its reputation among Spanish flamenco companies, its wide network of contacts among foreign programmers, and its openness to collaborate in a longitudinal study favored

the choice of FF. This unique opportunity enabled the investigation of the practices involved in the increasing internationalization of flamenco in the past two decades.

Table 1. FF activity assessment 1998–2018.

International Markets	Shows	Spectators	Cities	Artists ¹
US and Canada	652	900,000	41	
UK	275	400,000	2	
Rest of World	190	350,000	58	
Asia/Oceania			20	
Europe			19	
South America			14	
Middle East			5	
TOTAL	1117	1,650,000	101	126

¹ Number of artistic companies represented in international markets. Source: Own elaboration.

3.3. Reliability and Validity

The practical methodology to capture data was interviews, documents, and direct observation [53], to obtain rich information about the company, its evolution, its strategic decisions, its partners and challenges. Empirical material from 2009 to 2018 (see Table 2), including press releases and reports about flamenco internationalization, brochures and internal information, and interviews and direct observation, was collected. Semistructured interviews with the director and collaborators (16 interviews, approximately 25 hours' worth) were conducted. The process involved exhaustive note-taking, with concrete questions about doubts, inconsistencies, and decision-making criteria. To triangulate the findings, the same questions were asked several different times, to observe changes through time, stemming from FF's learning and the change in the sector's own dynamics. Meetings with two flamenco companies represented by FF, with two international programmers from Japan and the United States, were also attended, as well as the 2017 event of FF London, where the researcher had the opportunity to spend time with the main artists, press, and show representatives. After each event of direct observation, the key ideas observed were written down and later compared in interviews with the FF director.

Table 2. Summary of interviews and meetings.

Summary of Data Meetings/Interviews	Dates	Length	Field of Knowledge
Interviews with FF entrepreneur	9/2009	1.5 h	General understanding of the FF company. Motivation and vision of international markets.
	4/2010	2 h	Challenges in the internationalization of flamenco. Success factors and value chain.
	7/2010	1 h	Product decisions and market selection.
	9/2010	1.5 h	Networking and public support. International audiences.
	1/2013	1.5 h	Challenges and new opportunities: Asian markets.
	9/2013	1.5 h	Touring and conflicts in value chain.
	11/2016	2 h	Entry modes in United Arab Emirates. Innovation in products.
	2/2017	1.5 h	Product decision communication and press.
	12/2017	1.5 h	Networking and international coordination.
	1/2018	1 h	Market knowledge and product development.
	7/2018	1 h	Competitive factors and strategy of FF.
Interviews with FF production manager	8/2018	2 h	Dynamics in internationalization of PA Strategies.
	11/2016	1.5 h	Relations with foreign partners and artists.
	2/2017	1.5 h	Audiences and activities in touring.
	1/2018	1 h	Plan of FF New York. Activities and challenges.

Table 2. Cont.

Summary of Data Meetings/Interviews	Dates	Length	Field of Knowledge
Interview with FF production assistant	2/2018	1 h	Activities and challenges in producing a festival.
Attending the FF London	2/2017		Deep understanding of international context and performances.
Attending meetings with artists	4/2010 9/2017	0.5 h 0.5 h	Understanding business relations between intermediaries and artists.
Attending meetings with international partners	9/2017 2/2018	1 h 0.5 h	Deep understanding of international context, trust and networks.

Source: Own elaboration.

From the exhaustive notes, explicative key ideas were created and presented in subsequent meetings to the informants to obtain their feedback. These meetings were critical to validate the results. To avoid bias from the high familiarization of the researcher with the field, the results were discussed with two colleague researchers, one specialized in international business and the other in cultural marketing. Last, following recommendations for qualitative analyses [44,49], the findings were related to the analysis of international business and cultural management literature.

4. Case Study

The creator of the FF company is an Andalusian economist with international entrepreneurship interests who obtained a grant to pursue a course in business administration in Kansas City (USA) and ended up, by sheer chance, obtaining a Master's in cultural arts in New York City. Despite his lack of experience in the sector, his entrepreneurial attitude helped him to see the potential development of the flamenco market for Spanish artists in New York. Thus, in 1996, he negotiated his first performance there. While he worked for local flamenco agents in the United States, he familiarized himself with the intermediation business, negotiating with artists in Spain for opportunities in New York, and began to define his own enterprise as agent–producer of flamenco with an international vision. In observing the little impact of individual shows, he decided to organize a festival to attract the attention of the press, and in 2001, the first event was celebrated in the City Center. Two years later, the FF London was inaugurated at the Sadler's Well (see Figure 1). Since then, annual events have occurred in both places, with the recurring presence of acclaimed Spanish artists.

With the annual celebration of both festivals set, FF's founder initiated a geographic diversification plan and, to avoid competing directly with the intermediaries in the traditional European markets, decided to explore new markets. The existence of a flamenco tradition in Japan and his participation in international events in Japan (2005), China, and Thailand (2007) were the beginning of his bid to expand flamenco in Asia and Oceania. In 2008, he entered Latin America, where there is a greater tradition and cultural affinity, and in 2014, he began exploring the Middle Eastern market.

FF adopted a strategy of innovation in the selection of the shows brought to festivals, taking risks with innovative flamenco proposals and promoting the fusion with other genres (e.g., jazz, modern dance) to attract new audiences. As an intermediary agent, FF's founder also introduced flamenco to other non-flamenco international festivals and worked to enrich festivals by incorporating other educational activities. Most (80%) of FF's activities come from its work as a festival producer and the rest from the organization of tours. Its organizational structure is small, by personal choice, enabling the director to remain a cultural entrepreneur, creating markets for the internationalization of flamenco. The economic viability of the international flamenco productions depends mainly on ticket sales, despite the pursuit of institutional sponsorship.

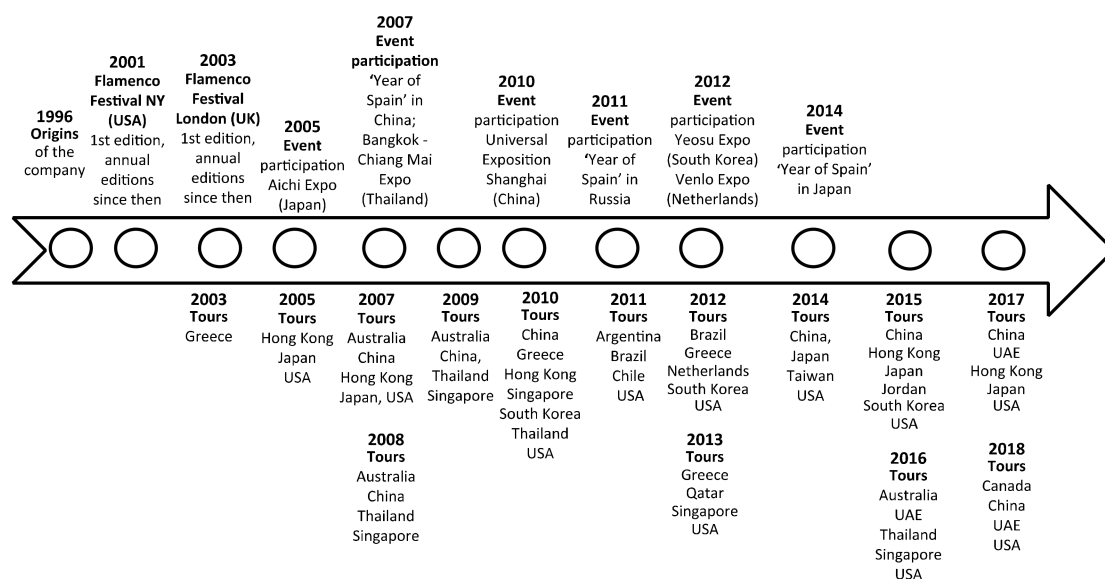


Figure 1. Diversification of FF international markets. Source: Own elaboration.

5. Findings

5.1. Why? Motivations and Global Vision to Overcome the Dichotomy between Artistic and Economic Objectives

The personal motivations of FF's founder and his vision of the global potential of flamenco were critical to turning festivals into platforms for the positioning of flamenco in the international PA circuit. His autonomy, passion, and self-fulfillment were paramount to his motivation, as were artistic concerns about making a contribution to popular culture and achieving a reputation within the cultural sector. These findings are in accordance with the literature on cultural entrepreneurship [54].

"In culture, we work with the vision of giving the product its maximum expression, and not in terms of profitability, not only on the side of the artistic companies, but also of my enterprise. If it is necessary, we lower our commissions so that the product is of high quality." (FF's founder)

As FF's founder had an international entrepreneurial vision and was the person to assume the financial and reputational risks with the theater, he was interested not only in the "artistic success of the performance" but also in the economic and financial viability of the shows, to maintain their reputation for future hiring. This international vision, along with his management knowledge, allowed him to introduce efficiency criteria in the development of productions, financing objectives, and deal compliance, to overcome the dichotomy between artistic objectives and economic motivations [17,41] and to succeed in international markets. 'Growth for the sake of growth' is not as important a motivation as in other sectors, as economies of scale are not possible for live performances.

"My success...is that I can come back to theaters, not because they have made money (they sometimes make it and they sometimes lose it), but because of the qualityThey like flamenco, it generates reputation for them, . . . and lastly, because we have management capabilities." (FF's founder)

In the case of the flamenco artists, the motivations for an international performance appear to be the prestige value and reputation, accumulation of experience and knowledge, and increased revenues, as in the last decade, the reduction in public support to PA in Spain has been an important stimulus for internationalization. However, such performances can be a significant challenge for many artists due to the personal cost of working abroad. The physical and psychic distance [55], in particular differences in language and lack of travel experience, can be an inhibitor to internationalization, though the main

conflicts FF faces in its international intermediation of flamenco are the lack of international vision in the management of artistic companies and the lack of knowledge about the liabilities of PAs in international markets.

Although the reduction of the domestic market and the reputation and artistic prestige are sound stimuli for flamenco artists to consider new markets, the lack of international vision and the resistance to adapting their professional practices to international markets (e.g., lowering their fees, participating in promotional activities to increase ticket sales) have been the main inhibitors for artists. In this case, international activity is usually intermittent, as artists tend to accept specific jobs that satisfy their short-term expectations, without investing in or firmly committing to new markets.

“Decision-making is not always driven by rationality, costs could be reduced without putting at risk the artistic quality of the show; but it would indeed imply a reduction of the artists’ fees.”
(FF’s founder)

5.2. What? Product Quality Based in Maintaining the Core Meaning and Adapting the Ancillaries

Strategic decisions during the design of festivals include selecting the performances that will be featured. When deciding what products to export, FF was faced with the dilemma of standardizing or adapting the product. This decision is further complicated by the PA product’s two parts: the core or primary product, related to the symbolic value the artist wants to transmit, and ancillary (i.e., non-artistic) resources. The question often was whether the meaning of the artistic product had to be adapted—assuming the risk of banalization/loss of the symbolic value and what investments had to be made in other secondary or ancillary elements of the product to adjust to the audience; this is a common debate in cultural economics [56,57].

First, it is necessary to assess the quality of the show, taking into account its degree of familiarity/novelty to the audience. The more familiar or traditional a show, the easier it is to find an audience. More innovative shows may entail a higher risk, though some audiences do want novelty. Therefore, decisions tend to be oriented to selecting high-quality shows and choosing a theater that can adjust to each show.

“The international agent also has to have an artistic vision, in order to understand the artist’s concept and the vision of the theater, to look for the natural audience for each show.” (FF’s founder)

The FF philosophy was thus to export the best quality of traditional flamenco across the world and to gradually introduce the most innovative and avant-garde shows, which were increasingly accepted by the market.

The overall quality depends as much on the essence of the performance as on the ancillaries, and in that sense, the relationship of producers and programmers with the artists and their managers is not always easy, and tensions from the lack of professionalization in many companies are common. Internationalization has actually helped companies professionalize the process of creation and execution of the show.

Changing the core meaning of the work is not necessary—it can even be counterproductive, as renouncing to the artistic value of the product is not a sustainable way of competing in the main international performing arts markets—but adapting the ancillaries related to communication with each market is useful to overcome the cultural discount, without the purity of the art showcased being affected. Considering that shows are experience goods [9], important decisions about the information and promotion around the products must be made. The less known a show or an artist is, the more important it is to raise awareness through marketing campaigns (e.g., photographs, program handouts, media coverage in the main newspapers and other local media), and this can usually be done in collaboration with the theater, which has an intimate knowledge of the market.

Second, the opinion of experts is fundamental to establishing the quality of a performance, and getting a review in a reputable newspaper is critical [58]. Critics from reputable newspapers are influential factors in deciding whether to attend a show and often of persuading other theaters to

accept the spectacle. Therefore, production companies undertake an important networking activity with the media to stimulate product awareness of an intangible and experience product.

“Flamenco has its audience, but that needs to be communicated, and that is the most difficult thing to do in these big cities.” (FF’s founder)

The cooperation of artists in the development of ancillaries is crucial. Here, however, international agents–producers are often confronted with the lack of sensibility of the artistic companies: changing some ancillaries (e.g., promotion photos and material) should not automatically be considered a trauma, but FF often faces resistance from the artists to do so, who may refuse to do things differently in different markets and/or participate in communication efforts with the press, forcing international intermediaries to fill this gap. From the point of view of sustainable cultural management, this finding highlights the importance of the artist and the management team working together in international business management, questioning the separation between the labor of the artist (ensuring the artistic quality of the show) and that of the manager (in charge of business practices like marketing). Ensuring product awareness among potential audiences is a common labor in which artists too must participate, along with producers and programmers.

5.3. Where? Market Selection to Fit the Artistic Product to the Audience

There is a clear set of relevant criteria for measuring the degree of attractiveness of an international market for flamenco, and these are not necessarily related to the country, the size of the market, the geographic distance, or the representation of the community of origin, but they do relate to the venue’s prestige and international artistic reputation of the city. Therefore, the main criterion is to find the right venue for each show. Given the symbolic value of the product and the practices of cultural consumption, it is necessary to fit the artistic product to the audience.

At the international level is a series of theaters considered the best presentation card for a PA company, such as Carnegie Hall or City Center in New York. Moreover, cultural markets are located predominantly in large cities, and specific cities have a special mark in the area of PA, including New York, London, Paris, Singapore, and Sydney.

In focusing its international efforts on specific geographic areas, FF’s strategy is coherent with international business theory, which posits that this approach to internationalization may yield better results [59]. When adding shows to the tours, FF also uses general market selection criteria, adding cities in Asia and the Middle East given their dynamism and geostrategic position. In many cases, the cities are selected because they are on their way to becoming a central destination in the main markets or are well-connected through low-cost transportation, as is the case of Dubai. The personal interest of the entrepreneur, the location of his networks, and his attendance at trade fairs also can influence the decision.

“Having the guarantee of having performed at the Sadler’s Wells is an introduction letter to get into the Sydney Opera.” (FF’s founder)

In contrast with other industries, conducting a market study before entering a new potential market is not possible; the cost–benefit analysis is undertaken during the design and contracting of the project, because there is no previous cost estimation, especially in a new market. Rather, the process is initiated and investments are made to initiate a tour or show, and during the design process, the costs and obstacles are assessed; occasionally, the project is abandoned after investments have already been made, putting its profitability at risk. Thus, the approach is more effectual than market research, and there is more risk-taking for the international intermediary that organizes the tour.

The case of flamenco also presents a particularity in relation to other PAs, derived from its nature as a universal art, which diminishes the cultural discount and transmits authenticity and value to people of different countries without the need for them to know the language or traditions of the culture of origin. Therefore, it is not necessary to link exporting to countries where the community of

origin is highly represented, as was the case of Riverdance, the musical hit based on traditional Irish music, whose internationalization was based on the wide Irish community in the United States.

5.4. How? Entry Modes and Intermediaries' Role to Ensure Sustainable Cultural Management

The internationalization of flamenco is undertaken through one of the following forms of entry: festivals of flamenco or of general music and dance, individual shows, and tours. FF takes part as a producer or distributing agent in all forms of entry. Flamenco festivals have become platforms from which to leapfrog to the rest of the world, providing advantages for the artists (e.g., reputation, learning) and for festival producers, who consolidate their network to gain easier access to other markets.

There are varying degrees of creativity and managerial control in the different phases of the process of creating and performing a festival or tour. In designing a tour, as previously mentioned, the main criteria are to identify the most appropriate theaters for the show and to control costs; in this way, many variables influence the final design: key theaters in main cities, selection of other cities to leverage scale economies, negotiation of performance days (to string days together instead of just performing on weekends), flight availability, different confirmation dates, and so on. Thus, negotiations are complex and, following the sequential approach [34], require (a) knowledge about the PA industry in each country, its culture, the availability of air transport, and so on; (b) entrepreneurial capability (innovation, proactivity and risk-taking); and (c) being part of relevant PA networks. When the main artist of the work is not well-known outside of Spain, international booking largely depends on the climate of confidence established over time between the intermediary agent and the programmer. Here, relational context plays a significant role, as it is the agent who invests in networks and leverages fundamental institutional support (embassies, government agencies) to develop the market.

Theoretically, the artistic company could choose to access the market directly, or indirectly, through intermediaries, but the lack of professional structures and managers makes it more difficult for companies to lead an internationalization strategy: They do negotiate some single shows directly, but they do not have the knowledge and networks to overcome the liabilities of foreignness and outsidership and often fail to make efficient use of intermediaries. The flamenco companies that do have specialized agents in each market are few, with many flamenco artists still believing that the intermediary is only “a person who collects a commission”.

“The figure of the manager is very standardized in the USA, but not here in Spain, where postgraduate degrees in cultural activities are very recent. Flamenco has grown to an international level as the management structures in the companies have been updated”. (FF's founder)

Another challenge is underestimation of the complexities of the different business practices and their influence in international contracting. The case of flamenco, in which informality is commonplace in many aspects, contrasts with the usual business practices in international markets (e.g., fees negotiations, hiring schedules, ancillaries demanded), which require professionalism and coordinated work. Moreover, the informality of many flamenco artists tends to make external agents doubt their dependability.

As for other small ventures, intermediaries play an important role in internationalization, due to the limited resources these enterprises usually must overcome when going abroad [43]. In this sector, intermediaries create and develop markets, and ensure the sustainable cultural management of international strategy by:

- Matching the best venue to each specific show, as a way to guarantee its success while preserving the authenticity of the symbolic value;
- Ensuring the balance between artistic and audience satisfaction objectives with efficiency and/or financing objectives that guarantee the different interests of the value chain;
- Filling the gap introduced by physical, psychological and cultural distance, especially the difference between professional practices and the lack of management of the artists;

- Enhancing artists' reputation by offering entry modes to better venues and providing trust, when the intermediary negotiating with venues does not know the artist;
- Providing more operational services (visas, flights, accompaniment to the destination, financing); and
- Aiding in booking and coordination, taking on financial and reputational risks, and relying on managerial and business competencies along with artistic skills [60] to satisfy multiples objectives of different stakeholders.

6. Conclusions and Management Implications

In this paper, we looked at the performing arts subsector from an internal perspective in order to reveal how it manages “the international strategy” in order to ensure its economic, social, and cultural sustainability, ensuring the satisfaction of the international audience while maintaining the authenticity of the symbolic value of the products, and the sustainability of the organizations through business practices. The findings of this study have theoretical and practical implications for a cultural sector with few references in internationalization that is seeking for international markets to become sustainable given public financing cuts and strong competition in the domestic market.

As a first contribution, this study offers a clearer picture of the particularities of the PA internationalization process, which starts with the initial motivation to go abroad and continues with market selection, product adaptation, and forms of entry and consolidation in the market. This case study on the internationalization of flamenco in the past 20 years identifies the specific criteria in international strategic decisions in the PA sector, which stem from two distinctive characteristics of PA: the symbolic value of products rooted in local cultures and conflicts in managing the artistic versus economic performance. These characteristics explain the potential significance of the liabilities of foreignness and outsidership for PA products, and our findings are also relevant regarding the specific resources and capabilities PA agents must deploy to overcome them and be sustainable in foreign markets. The results are consistent with the main insights of the updated Uppsala sequential approach: knowledge and international vision, reputation in PA value chain networks, and entrepreneurial capability [34].

We have revealed as a driver of the successful internationalization strategy of flamenco, contributing at the same time to artistic and economic objectives, the motivations for international markets of all the agents in the value chain, the artist, and those with business management roles such as the international producer, who have the goal of ensuring the artistic excellence of the product and its diffusion in the best scenic spaces. It is the international vision and the business competences of some managers and intermediaries, which ensures the economic sustainability, thus overcoming the traditional dichotomy between economic and artistic motivations. This motivation and international vision determines the rest of strategic decisions: a) of product: quality, authentic, even innovative shows are the ones exported, and much is invested into adapting the marketing and communication elements to the different audiences; b) of market selection: the main criterion is finding the audience—the best venue—for each show, which demands a deep knowledge of the market, so specialization in certain geographical markets ensures good results; c) of entry modes: The intermediaries that organize festivals or tours play an important role in ensuring the sustainable cultural management of the internationalization strategy, by taking economic risks and putting in place business practices to satisfy the economic and artistic demands of the multiple stakeholders.

The study also suggests that the Uppsala approach is useful in understanding festivals as a product developed by intermediaries in the PA value chain that maintain relationships with networks and represent a higher commitment to markets, which in turn bolsters learning, the creation of market opportunities, and trust between agents. In doing so, it contributes to the discussion on the capacity of existing internationalization theories to explain what happens in the creative industries [9,15]. Furthermore, we enrich internationalization theory, by explaining the case of flamenco, which has managed to turn sustainability into a competitive advantage in the internationalization process. It

expands cultural management literature by focusing on the strategic decisions that leverage the benefits and overcome the risks of PA internationalization, revealing the imposture of the dichotomy between cultural and economic objectives to show how both can be achieved with strategic internationalization decisions. Second, the important role of intermediaries in creating and developing international markets for a symbolic product rooted in local values is identified. Intermediaries bridge the gaps between different actors of the PA value chain due to cultural differences in professional practices, prior management capabilities, international vision, and goals and incentives.

A take-away lesson for artists is to consider the opportunities of foreign markets; that is, artistic companies should actively include internationalization as part of their artistic career plans and, in consequence, consider the changes they could adopt in their practices and strategic decisions to optimize their impact. An artistic product that triumphs in domestic markets or that attracts tourists does not automatically mean that it will be a success internationally. Artistic companies need to change their management and international vision to adjust their criteria regarding fees, number of performances, participation in ancillary communication awareness, and regularity in a market to ensure trust. If their international decisions simply encompass a short-term objective, problems will soon arise. Managers must also pay attention to intermediaries as key agents in developing their strategy. Finally, the findings suggest that PA policies should focus on supporting the participation of artist companies in the most important venues/cities in each type of art. The public sector plays a critical role in developing and financing internationalization, but not all forms of internationalization have the same impact on the sustainability of PA, and the theaters/cities that are better positioned in the global scale are those that generate reputation and open the most doors to other markets.

This exploratory study has limitations, in that it is based on a representative case study of the successful internationalization of flamenco. Further research could examine artistic companies' management vision about drivers and barriers to internationalization and the role of intermediaries in their international artistic career. We must not expect the results of this study to contribute to other sectors obtaining a high level of international recognition. However, we can expect these results to be useful in the internationalization strategies of artists or companies of any other artistic expressions, which, as long as they have a quality show, may be able to internationalize into a scenic arts market. This allows future research to apply these propositions to other arts expressions and either confirm or reject our findings.

Finally, we acknowledge that the COVID-19 pandemic is going to have a strong impact on the flamenco sector because internationalization provides a high percentage of total income, both from the representation of works outside of Spain and from the important number of tourists who visit Spain and consume flamenco shows. To the state of emergency and the closing down of non-essential activities, we must add the closure of the airspace and the fact that the pandemic is global, so the option of opening new markets not currently affected by COVID-19 is not available. The intermediaries, such as the agent of the analyzed case, have seen all of their contracted shows cancelled since mid-March and find themselves having to reprogram, but without being able to invest in the commercialization actions that should normally be underway to present the shows of next autumn, given the uncertainty about the reopening of theatres and airspaces. Moreover, they are looking for ways to reduce the high risk taken by international intermediaries. It is to be expected for promoters to make changes to contracts, including, for instance, cancellation clauses if shows do not get a certain level of ticket sales, which will entail a higher risk for artistic companies. We can also expect a reduction of international markets for performing arts, due to the adoption of protectionist policies to favor the contracting of domestic cultural enterprises.

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