

Dancing Through Life: Passion, Precarity and the Work-Life Balance among Forró Teachers in Portugal

Author: Mira Kraus
Student ID: h1512881
Supervisor: PD Mag. Dr. Barbara Haas
Word count: 21 712 words

Vienna, September 2025

Abstract

Background: Dancing is positively associated with (mental) health and general well-being. However, the work of dance teachers remains undervalued in economic terms and is not considered on par with 'technical' occupations. Moreover, many scholars highlight the precarious conditions within the creative industries, marked by blurred boundaries between personal and professional life, job insecurity, challenges through freelancing, and overwork.

Objective: The aim of this study is to explore the working and living conditions of *forró* teachers in Portugal, with *forró* being a Brazilian partner dance. Moreover, it investigates how these teachers experience and navigate the intersection of passion, work, and personal life.

Methods: The study follows a qualitative research design, employing one-on-one, problem-centred interviews. Moreover, the Grounded Theory Method guided the data analysis process, allowing themes to emerge from the participants' narratives.

Conclusion: The research revealed two central findings: (1) *forró* teaching is a passion-driven profession, and (2) *forró* teachers face challenging working and living conditions. Participants described *forró* not merely as a job, but as a lifestyle that shapes their identity and everyday experiences. Although their work with *forró* offers personal fulfilment and a sense of accomplishment, teachers also face considerable difficulties, such as maintaining work-life balance and coping with the physical demands of their profession.

Acknowledgements

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to my supervisor, PD Mag. Dr. Barbara Haas, for all guidance and valuable feedback throughout this project. Moreover, I am deeply thankful to every single interviewee who generously offered their time and perspectives during the interviews. Lastly, I also wish to acknowledge my friends, whose thoughtful input greatly assisted me in refining my ideas and arguments.

Table of Contents

1.	Introduction	1
2.	Contextual Background & Literature Review.....	4
2.1.	What is Forró?	4
2.2.	Theoretical Lense: The Precarious Artist.....	4
2.3.	State of the Art: Working and Living Conditions in the Creative Sector	6
3.	Research Methodology.....	12
3.1.	Data Collection: Qualitative Interviews.....	12
3.2.	Data Analysis: Grounded Theory Method	14
3.3.	Positionality Statement.....	22
3.4.	Limitations & Evaluation	23
4.	Results	24
4.1.	Passion-Driven Profession.....	24
4.2.	Difficult Artist Life Conditions.....	28
4.3.	Coping Strategies.....	38
4.4.	Future of Work	39
5.	Discussion	41
6.	Conclusion & Outlook.....	44
7.	References	46
8.	Appendices	50
8.1.	Appendix A: Overview of Interviews.....	50
8.2.	Appendix B: Final Interview Guide (in Portuguese)	51
8.3.	Appendix C: Consent Form (in Portuguese)	53

List of Figures

Figure 3.1 The research process	17
Figure 3.2 The Spiral Model of Abstraction	19

Abbreviations

EDN	European Dance Development Network
GTM	Grounded Theory Method
PCI	Problem-centred Interview

1. Introduction

Is dancing special? For those of us passionate about dance - about creating it, watching it, analysing it, or writing about it - dance and dancing seem special, and especially compelling. The contribution of dance to societal well-being is both manifold and significant (Baybutt, 2023). More specifically, a growing body of evidence highlights how dance and movement can contribute to improved individual and collective (mental) health and well-being. One of the most influential contributions to recent discussions on the relationship between the arts, health, and well-being is the scoping review published by the World Health Organisation (WHO) in 2019 (as cited in Baltà Portolés, 2021, p.5), which analysed over 900 publications published since 2000. The scoping review revealed many connections between dance and health, in areas including improvements in mental health, subjective well-being, the reduction of cognitive decline, improvements in patients with degenerative neurological disorders, and contributions to health communication (WHO, 2019, as cited in Baltà Portolés, 2021).

However, in many contemporary countries and their societies, the “arts”, whether as an activity or as a product, are viewed as having little monetary value. The marginal status of the arts in, for instance, US public school systems highlights the extent to which they are undervalued as a core competency of today’s society (Desmond, 2019). Robinson (2017) illustrates this point succinctly in her op-ed published in *DANCE Magazine*¹: “We are telling them that their passion is not worth our money. Yet, in the same breath, we turn and tell them to keep creating.” According to her, expecting artists to work for free is absurd; she asserts that the same expectation would never be placed on an engineer to assemble something on the spot. The labour involved in creative work is rarely valued on par with ‘technical’ skills. Professions such as doctors, lawyers, and engineers are often regarded as the pinnacle of technical education; however, few pause to reflect on the immense hours a ballerina devotes to achieving proficiency, let alone excellence. In continuation, Robinson (2017) argues that respect for artists needs to translate to respecting their need to be paid a living wage and appreciating the extensive hours invested into creation. In her words: “It is good and well to say that arts are valued. But until artists are compensated at a level that allows them to call themselves professionals without working a second job, it’s all just bluster” (Robinson, 2017). Expanding on this, Vallejos (2019, p.35) observes that “dance is not considered as a productive work—nor are nonofficial dancers considered as real workers—by most of the cultural, political, and labor institutions in the [Argentinian] country, either implicitly or explicitly.” Addressing this issue, Sarah Cecilia Bukowski, a volunteer committee member of the Dance Artists’ National Collective, powerfully declares: “Dance work is work, full stop” (Rizzuto, 2021). Moreover, Shorter et al. (2018) point out that adverse working conditions, combined with a lack of appropriate recognition of the value of the work, give rise to stress and mental health challenges. In this context, it is important to recognise that the impact of artists’ activities on local economies goes far beyond what can be measured by formal art markets (Lloyd, 2010, as cited in Van Assche, 2018, p.83).

¹ <https://dancemagazine.com/>

The issue lies in what Van Assche (2018, p.85) put succinctly: “They [artists] experience difficulties translating their high cultural capital into economic capital.”

The discussion above points to a broader concern, namely the precarity experienced by creative workers. Petra Sabisch (2006, as cited in Van Assche, 2018, p.99) provides a detailed analysis of the evolution of the socio-economic position of dance artists in Germany (and Europe) since the 1990s, revealing the persistent precarity of the profession. She remarks that, although the precarious conditions have been recognised for years, they have worsened significantly, particularly with regard to income development and gender equality. Following Goodwin (2019), the creative industries are characterised by high levels of employment insecurity and limited opportunities for career progression, making it difficult to build a sustainable career. Therefore, cultural workers must take an active role in building discipline-oriented career self-management skills while also developing the personal resources necessary to withstand the stress associated with precarious work. In this context, cultivating self-efficacy and career optimism have been identified as key factors for career success, because both support resilience and persistence when faced with career challenges (Goodwin, 2019). Furthermore, Van Assche (2018) highlights that many creative professionals value their own autonomy and the pursuit of self-realisation. This, at least partly, contributes to their willingness to endure high levels of insecurity and material scarcity. Accordingly, they often view their profession not in terms of a job but rather as a lifestyle (Van Assche, 2018). Building on this, Hesmondhalgh and Baker (2010) draw attention to how the creative industries foster dynamics of self-exploitation and the erosion of the boundary between work and leisure.

With this in mind, as Hesmondhalgh and Baker (2010) succinctly articulate, a lack of careful consideration of the conditions associated with creative labour may result in the continued reproduction of labour markets characterised by irregular, insecure, and unprotected work. This implies that alongside the intrinsic importance of studying the quality of working life in these growing industries, there is also a policy rationale for such investigation. Still, there has been a notable lack of qualitative studies addressing both the working conditions and lived experiences of cultural workers.

Therefore, this thesis seeks to explore the working and living conditions of forró teachers in Portugal², with particular emphasis on the interrelation between their professional and private lives. Additionally, the study explores their motivations, values, challenges, and coping strategies regarding their professional path. In particular, the following research questions will be addressed:

- (1) What are the working and living conditions of forró teachers in Portugal?**
- (2) How do forró teachers in Portugal experience and navigate the intersection of passion, work, and personal life?**

Fundamentally, the first question served as a starting point for this inquiry and informed the first round of interviews. The second, in contrast, emerged from insights gathered during initial data collection and reflects

² Forró is a Brazilian couple dance and will be introduced in more detail in chapter 2.1 What is Forró?

themes that appear to be particularly important within the field under study. This research project aims to contribute to cultural research, with a particular focus on dance studies. As such, the findings are based on qualitative research involving forró teachers based in Portugal. Lastly, while policy implications are not the primary focus, this study may nevertheless offer insights that could inform future discussions around working conditions in the creative industries.

The thesis is organised as follows: it begins with an introduction to forró and the concept of precarity, followed by a review of existing literature on the working and living conditions of cultural workers. The following chapter outlines the methodology employed in this research. Subsequently, the research findings derived from the collected data are presented. Next, the discussion chapter interprets these results in relation to the research questions and the reviewed literature. Finally, the thesis concludes with a summary of key insights and closing remarks.

2. Contextual Background & Literature Review

To better understand the research context as well as findings of and gaps within previous works, this chapter presents a structured review of relevant literature. It is divided into three main sections: the first section provides an introduction to forró as a cultural and artistic practice. The second section introduces the concept of the precarious artist, situating the experiences of dance professionals within broader social science debates on cultural labour and precarity. Finally, the third section reviews existing literature on the working and living conditions of cultural workers more broadly, uncovering key economic, social, and emotional dimensions of freelance artistic work.

2.1. What is Forró?

Forró is a traditional Brazilian music and partner dance genre that originated in the Northeast of Brazil. The dance is typically danced with a partner, featuring a distinctive combination of simple yet expressive steps and characterized by musicality, non-verbal communication, and coordinated footwork. In its traditional form it features the following instruments: the accordion, triangle, and zabumba (Dias & Dupan, 2017).

Over the past few decades, forró has gained popularity beyond its country of origin and has developed a growing community in European countries, including Portugal. Despite its growing global presence, forró remains deeply rooted in Brazilian culture, reflecting regional identities, social connections, and the joyful spirit of communal celebration (Dias & Dupan, 2017). Within this community, forró teachers play a central role in maintaining and transmitting the cultural practice. More specifically, Portugal was chosen for the context of this study, because it is home to many Brazilian nationals and has one of the biggest and most vivid forró communities in Europe.

2.2. Theoretical Lense: The Precarious Artist

This chapter provides a detailed introduction to the concept of precarity and its relation to the working and living conditions of cultural workers. The discussion chapter will then build on these ideas, exploring the insights that the analytical lens of precarity can offer regarding the experiences of forró teachers in Portugal.

Precarity has become a common concept in the contemporary discussions in social sciences, especially in research on theories on post-Fordism's flexible work formats and, in particular, within the field of artistic labour (Van Assche, 2018). The European Dance Development Network (EDN, 2023) reinforces this notion by stating: "Within the dance ecosystem, professional practices are often precarious." Dance is generally not regarded as productive work by most cultural, political, and labour institutions. For example, there is no specific dancer's labour union. This exclusion from the labour system is exacerbated by the unique working conditions and health insurance needs that dancers face (Ellmeier, 2003; Vallejos, 2019).

Building on Lorey (2006), this thesis argues that precarious working conditions go hand in hand with precarious living conditions, as will be discussed in more detail in the discussion section. This study defines precarious labour, within the context of the creative industry, as "involving work that is carried out in a variety of economically and

legally insecure circumstances, such as the absence of long-term contracts and career prospects, low wages, poor working conditions, and only minimal or no social protection, among other things.” (Pewny, 2011a; Kalleberg & Vallas, 2017b, as cited in Van Assche, 2018, p. 8). Alternatively, Brophy and de Peuter (2007, as cited in Hesmondhalgh & Baker, 2011, p.161) denote precarity as “a collectively created conceptual tool, the practical purpose of which is to aid in naming, understanding and ultimately transforming the conditions of labour under post-Fordism.” Moreover, around the turn of the 21st century, the noun *precariat* emerged. Popularised by Standing (2011), the term is a fusion of *precarious* and *proletariat*, the latter referring to the 20th-century industrial working class, historically associated with the development of labour law, collective bargaining, and trade unions. The *precariat*, by contrast, denotes an emerging global class characterised by unstable labour arrangements, lack of identity, and erosion of rights (Standing, 2018).

Ellmeier (2003) argues that the economic shift to post-Fordism, beginning in the 1970s in Western Europe, initiated a destabilisation of living and working conditions. Importantly, this transformation and its increasing institutionalisation, is often linked to the growing predominance of immaterial labour. In this new system of production, full-time jobs with long-term contracts are slowly replaced by flexible and project-based work, usually without sick pay, paid vacations, unemployment compensation, and without any job security. In fact, as traditional employment structures diminish, many workers engage in multiple projects simultaneously, in anticipation of periods without work. Others maintain a steady day job while freelancing on the side (Kong, 2011). The perfect example for a post-Fordist worker is the precarious intellectual, namely self-employed individuals or project workers in the spheres of the sciences or the creative industries. In other words, entrepreneurial individuals who work anywhere and anytime in exchange for low financial return or non-monetary rewards (Ellmeier, 2003). Accordingly, this kind of work has caused increasing difficulties in distinguishing leisure time from work time. Precarity goes hand in hand with a sustained state of temporality, marked by short-termism, multi-tasking and, predominantly, a constant feeling of being on stand-by. The latter refers to the sense of having always far too much to do, while taking time off provokes anxiety about missing potential opportunities or overlooking important tasks (Van Assche, 2018). Correspondingly, Standing (2014a, as cited in Van Assche, 2018) identifies a lack of control over time as a defining characteristic of the so-called precariat. He emphasises that dance artists experience a persistent sense of temporal uncertainty, meaning that nothing feels stable or lasting, and most artists are confronted with an uncertain future without a clear or secure career path.

According to Pewny (2011, as cited in Blades, 2019), the term precarity refers to a state of instability, particularly in situations where individuals lack control over their living and working conditions. That said, other scholars point out that precarious intellectuals can be perceived, at least in part, as being poor by choice (Van Assche, 2018), or what Lorey (2006) refers to as ‘self-precarization’. In this regard, Lorey (2006) conceptualises *precarisation* as the process of normalisation of socio-economic insecurity. Similarly, Brophy and de Peuter (2007, as cited in Hesmondhalgh & Baker, 2011) claim that precarisation should not be viewed simply as something imposed from above but entails the internalisation of certain techniques and practices. They further point out that the discourses surrounding precarity can be misleading, with ‘flexibility’ often carrying connotations of freedom, nomadism and lack of rigidity. According to Van Assche (2018), creative workers in particular are ideal

subjects for exploitation: as long as they have enough to survive, they seem to be willing to accept lower material benefits in exchange for immaterial ones, such as, artistic pleasure, temporal autonomy, a free work environment, and opportunities for self-realisation (Lorey, 2006; Van Assche, 2017). However, Neocleous (2013, as cited in Van Assche, 2017, p.239) emphasises that “we ought to do more than merely survive: we need to resist mere resilience and resist (self-)precarisation.” This study will uncover that such a (partly) voluntary adoption, driven by the desire for self-directed and autonomous work, certainly exists among *forró* teachers in Portugal.

2.3. State of the Art: Working and Living Conditions in the Creative Sector

This chapter outlines key findings from the extant literature concerning the working and living conditions of professionals in the creative sector. A first useful overview is given by Kong (2011), who notes that although creative work provides freedom, independence, and creative space, it is frequently described as precarious because the securities of traditional employment structures no longer hold. Correspondingly, Naclerio (2023) indicates that even though performing arts are sometimes praised for their creative potential for self-expression and self-realisation, the sector is also marked by employment instability, low pay, and a lack of social protection. In such a challenging work environment, artists often accept underpaid or unpaid work in an effort to prevent periods of unemployment and to build prospects for future work possibilities. Van Assche (2018) conceptualises this precariousness as multi-dimensional, naming its socio-economic, physical, and psychological dimensions. Similarly, Goodwin (2019) reports that the precariousness of labour affects those in the creative industries both economically and psychologically.

2.3.1. Insecurities, Challenges, Stress, and Working a lot

According to Hesmondhalgh and Baker (2011), most labour markets are characterised by *insecurities*, however, they emphasise that they are particularly pronounced in the cultural industries. This is due to the prevalence of uncertain, short-term job contracts as well as the high levels of subjective investment that creative workers place in their work. Moreover, they notice that the cultural industries show a substantial outflow during mid-career stages. They argue that the disconnect between traditional career trajectories and the life course of many women makes job uncertainties especially problematic for them. Furthermore, they examined in depth the mental and emotional states arising from the uncertainty faced by many cultural workers. Numerous participants reported experiencing nervousness, anxiety, and even panic as recurring elements in their day-to-day professional realities (Hesmondhalgh & Baker, 2010). By the same token, Van Assche (2018, p.276) observes that “project-based work in the arts is always accompanied by mental precarity.” This is because artists typically invest significant time, work effort, and often also personal financial resources, despite having no guarantee that their project will succeed or receive monetary compensation. To reinforce this statement, a respondent in Van Assche's (2017, p.240) study points out that “it’s important to have some resiliency to the state of not-knowing.” Robinson (2017) takes this further by highlighting that creativity cannot flourish in this state of semi-constant stress that freelance artists are exposed to. On a different note, Van Assche (2018) argues that the fast, mobile and flexible production modes in the cultural industries lead not only to struggles with burnout among workers, but also contribute to projects experiencing forms of exhaustion or collapse.

The next section will look at *financial aspects* as well as related *challenges* faced by cultural workers. In a 2005 New York survey of 2800 freelancers, 85% of respondents cited unstable income as a disadvantage of working independently (Horowitz et al., 2005, as cited in Kong, 2011, p.56). Likewise, Shorter et al. (2018, p.39) highlight that in their study economic challenges dominated the respondents' narratives; many identified "financial pressures as the primary source of stress in this sector." In particular, their analysis revealed three key issues: financial insecurity, low income, and the undervalued nature of creative work. Some participants reported having to work long hours and more than one job in order to earn sufficient income to continue working, at least partially, within the creative sector. Moreover, their findings revealed an anticipation among cultural workers that not all professional activities are financially compensated. To give an example, it is common practice not to receive remuneration for job-related meetings (Shorter et al., 2018). With respect to this, Lorey (2006) claims that unpaid or low-paid jobs in the culture or academic industries, what she labels 'voluntary' work, tend to be normalised as unchangeable, precluding expectations of better conditions. As a result, many individuals rely on supplementary, precarious work outside the sector in order to finance one's own cultural production. In a study conducted by Van Assche (2018), several participants disclosed that they had taken on jobs solely to afford the following month's rent. These were typically low-status day jobs such as bartending. In reference to this, Hesmondhalgh and Baker (2011) assert that multi-jobbing hinders the development of the skills and expertise needed to thrive. Building on this, Blades (2019) summarises in her article that dance artists often experience a lack of stable income and predominantly engage in project-based work. In addition to the more visible activities such as choreographing, rehearsing, and performing, they must also deal with numerous organisational and administrative tasks. Furthermore, most cultural workers handle several projects simultaneously while continuously chasing new work opportunities, which requires them to be not only creative and flexible but also skilled in self-promotion (Blades, 2019).

In continuation, Van Assche (2018) highlights that the artists' *bodies are their work instruments*. In precarious times, dance artists may feel compelled to put their bodies at risk, feeling that no other viable option is available. Participants in her study reported continuing to dance despite injuries or feeling ill, citing reasons such as fear of losing income or disappointing the choreographer. Van Assche (2018, p.272) characterises such situations as *precarity traps*, where dance artists feel they have no other option. Extending this idea, Baybutt (2023) maintains that the widespread practice of ignoring or disguising injuries prompts critical reflection on the structural conditions underpinning dance production.

To conclude, Hesmondhalgh and Baker (2010, p.4) provide a useful summary of artists' working conditions based on their qualitative study in England. They note that artists tend to hold multiple jobs; there is a predominance of self-employed workers; work is irregular, contracts are shorter-term, and there is little job protection; career prospects are uncertain; earnings are very unequal; artists are younger than other workers; and the workforce appears to be growing. In connection with this, in their study, Shorter et al. (2018, p.5) identify that specific characteristics of the creative sector work environment contribute to the likelihood of developing mental health problems. Examples included pressure to reach high standards (both externally and internally), irregular work (including contracts, financial security, irregular hours, and working outside the sector), the perceived lack of

value placed on their work, and the insufficient financial compensation. Moreover, Hesmondhalgh and Baker (2011) add that creative careers are also 'fragile' in the sense that they are challenging to maintain throughout a lifetime, particularly for women, whose life-cycle patterns of work and family commitments often conflict with the precarious, irregular, and insecure nature of artistic work. Lastly, they raise attention to the risk that the desire for self-realisation can lead to an over-identification of the self with work. This tendency is especially accentuated through the specific forms this kind of attachment takes in creative labour (Hesmondhalgh & Baker, 2011).

2.3.2. The Complexities of Working Freelance

Goodwin (2019, p.123) notes that, due to the high proportion of *self-employment*, cultural workers are confronted with a 'hustle' of multi-faceted activities, in particular the need to build connections, learn about the industry, strengthen their reputations, and explore opportunities that lead to work. She argues that, in order to endure this hustle, workers need to stay resilient, commonly under harsh conditions, and actively cultivate career self-management skills. Furthermore, she highlights that, considering the unprotected nature of careers in the creative sector, self-efficacy becomes a crucial tool for maintaining intrinsic motivation when facing work-related challenges. Self-efficacy refers to the "individuals' self-belief in their ability to organise and execute actions to further their career" (Lent et al., 1994, as cited in Goodwin, 2019, p.123). Self-efficacy influences not only in shaping career decisions but also the effort, expenditure, thought patterns, and emotional reactions when challenged by obstacles (Lent et al., 1994, as cited in Goodwin, 2019).

Furthermore, Knights and McCabe (2003, as cited in Hesmondhalgh & Baker 2011, p.137) assert that self-organisation is something valued by employees because the ability to structure their own tasks contributes to a greater sense of meaning in their work. However, Banks (2007, as cited in Hesmondhalgh & Baker, 2011, p.136) believes that "to be (or appear to be) in control of one's destiny is what encourages workers to endorse the systems put in place to expedite flexible production." In other words, autonomy paradoxically reinforces self-exploitation or acceptance of unfavourable labour conditions. He explains that the appeal of autonomy is compelling enough to outweigh any doubts, constraints or disadvantages that might emerge in the daily realities of this highly competitive and uncertain field (Hesmondhalgh & Baker, 2011). Finally, Van Assche (2018) brings to light that autonomous work comes hand in hand with a fair amount of paperwork and other administrative tasks. She refers to this as the "permanent colonization of the artistic by the non-artistic" (Van Assche 2018, p.335).

2.3.3. Blurred Boundaries Between Private and Professional Life

Desmond (2019, p.98) claims that work and life are blurred for the dancer: "it is hard to tell where the work of dance, and the work of building a life that supports dancing, ends." In a similar way, Menger (2014, as cited in Naclerio, 2023, p.2) asserts that the way the creative industries function is characterised by the erosion of boundaries between work and leisure time. By the same token, Lorey (2006) points out how working time and free time lack clearly defined borders and, thus, make the separation between work and leisure increasingly ambiguous. More specifically, she argues that a considerable amount of knowledge is gained during unpaid time yet is essential and integral to their paid work. Furthermore, in Lorey's (2006) study, one interviewee poignantly captured the phenomenon when work and life increasingly permeate one another by stating that "work seeps

into your life.” Similarly, Van Assche (2017) observes that work and life have become inseparable for those in the creative sector. Participants in her study report that one strategy to maintain some separation is to establish a regular schedule. For instance, several interviewees articulated to make an effort to keep their weekends free from work as much as possible. However, whenever they are on tour it is not feasible, and they admit to still responding to emails and such. This tendency is further facilitated by the common practice of managing personal and professional accounts in one as well as the fact that many professional conversations take place via online messaging platforms nowadays (Van Assche, 2018). Moreover, Van Assche (2018) reveals that the actual work, i.e. the creative work, is always interwoven with life, as it remains ever-present in the artists’ minds. The administrative and organisational work, on the other hand, often fails to even be registered as work. On a different note, Van Assche (2018, p.93) mentions the prevalence of ‘*personal-professional confusion*’ in terms of (social) relationships. In the dance world, the overlap of friendships, professional ties and sometimes love relationships exemplifies yet another way the boundaries between personal and professional realms becomes blurred. Moreover, Hesmondhalgh and Baker (2011) point out that cultural work demands a high degree of interpersonal engagement because teamwork, socialising, and networking are essential to their profession. Building on this, they argue that the blurring of pleasure and obligation as well as freedom and constraint is a characteristic feature of creative labour (Hesmondhalgh & Baker, 2011).

Nevertheless, Hesmondhalgh and Baker (2011) suggest that when considering the detrimental effects of flexible capitalism, it is important to acknowledge the potentially positive benefits of career or occupational changes in people’s lives, which the next chapter will look at in more detail.

2.3.4. Passion-based Work Environments

Many scholars emphasise that working in the creative sector means for most individuals working with their passion, i.e. the deliberate choice to pursue a passion-driven career (Baybutt, 2023; Desmond, 2019; Hesmondhalgh & Baker, 2011; Naclerio, 2023, among others). Without passion and self-realisation fantasies, there would likely be insufficient willingness to endure the prevalent precarious working and living conditions (Lorey, 2006). In other words, “self-realisation through creative work is precariously linked to work–life balance” (Hesmondhalgh & Baker, 2011, p.151). Likewise, ‘pleasure in work’ is closely linked to self-exploitation (Hesmondhalgh & Baker, 2010, p.9). As already touched upon in chapter 2.2 *Theoretical Lense: The Precarious Artist*, among cultural workers, sovereignty seems to lie predominantly in the ‘free’ decision for precarisation, namely self-precariation. This, however, could be a central reason for the difficulty in recognising structural precarisation as a neo-liberal governmental phenomenon affecting society, and rarely resulting from genuinely free choice (Lorey, 2006). Whats more, Baybutt (2023) claims that the cultural industries exploit ‘passion’, in particular, using it as an excuse for perpetuating poor working conditions. In response this issue, Kong (2011) raises the question of why independent creative workers continue in such conditions. Her article points to the rise of ‘new labour’, in which self-actualisation plays a crucial role in work environments. Put differently, many independents value the freedom, independence, and creative space inherent in freelance work (Kong, 2011). In addition, Hesmondhalgh and Baker (2011) reinforce the idea of self-realisation through work by observing that cultural labourers frequently choose their professional path based on talents or enthusiasms from their

childhood. Furthermore, they argue that many creative workers experience their occupation as a way to realise personal potential, nurture their talents, and develop self-esteem, which in turn provide purpose and meaning in their lives (Hesmondhalgh & Baker, 2011).

In continuation, Hesmondhalgh and Baker (2010) observe particularly high levels of personal investment in cultural labour. For instance, workers often demonstrate emotional involvement that goes beyond viewing it as just a job, with their work also playing a central role in shaping their identity. However, some respondents in their study rejected the notion that they were defined by work (Hesmondhalgh & Baker, 2011). Linked to this, Desmond (2019) conceptualises dance and dancing as practice, as product, as identity. She notes that “a dancer is someone who dances, with that being a formative part of his or her social identity” (Desmond, 2019, p.97).

Despite the considerable precarity in creative industries, many workers tend to express high levels of satisfaction. Furthering this point, one of the central tensions in creative professions lies in navigating the tension between symbolic value and economic reward (Banks, 2007, as cited in Naclerio, 2023). Building on this, Naclerio (2023) reinforces that for creative labourers their work holds significant relevance in shaping their everyday decisions, as it provides meaning not only to their professional lives but also their personal identities. Passionate desires of self-realisation and self-expression constitute a core part of how respondents in her study understand work. Reflecting this notion, Van Assche (2018) finds that artistic pleasure, lifelong learning, and self-development are the most frequently cited reasons by survey respondents when asked to rank their top three motives for pursuing a career in dance. As a result of this, she concludes that cultural workers seem to compensate the shortage of material benefits with other currencies. In the study by Shorter et al. (2018) several participants voiced that they identify themselves as an artist, and this identity holds value to them. Moreover, some respondents perceive working in the creative industries as beneficial to their mental health (Shorter et al., 2018).

Along similar lines, Desmond (2019) points to the distinction between having a *job*, work pursued primarily for income and security, and having a *calling*, driven by passion or intrinsic motivations, regardless of whether or not it results in paid work. Correspondingly, several respondents in Naclerio’s (2023) study articulate an irrational and intimate connection to their art, describing it as a vocation pursued not for economic rewards, but out of subjective necessity. Developing this idea further, Goodwin (2019) notes that intrinsic motivation is regarded as a key contributor to career success. Finally, this section concludes with a compelling reflection by Van Assche (2018, p.87):

“A true bohemian lifestyle is the ideal artists can hope for, but as this book demonstrates, the reality actually demands much work, such as endless networking, a great deal of self-promotion, and a good dose of systematic self-management.”

This is further illustrated by an insightful excerpt from one of the interviews in her study (Van Assche, 2018, p.274):

“I need holidays!!” [Pretends to cry] [...] So I was like: what are my priorities? I was like: health, maybe, at a point I have to see... Of course, I could say, I don’t do this. But I need to earn money and also, I love performing! [my emphasis].”

2.3.5. Coping Mechanisms

Van Assche (2018) remarks that creative workers have established a variety of survival tactics to continue in their profession despite the (economic) challenges impacting their work and lives. In other words, the participants in her study show themselves resilient towards the prevailing precarity in the creative industries. Moreover, she indicates that artists find creative solutions to cope with these challenging conditions. For instance, cultural workers exchange goods or services directly for other goods or services without involving money transactions. Van Assche (2018, p.118) argues that this benefits everybody involved and works in the sense of: “when doing someone a favor, you may expect a favor in return.” Moreover, Naclerio (2023) emphasises that finding ways to deal with instabilities is vital for creative workers. Based on her results, she notes that cultural workers must navigate the tension between their passionate aspirations and the insecure structure of their field. Therefore, a common strategy is to realise internal and external diversification of their working activities (Naclerio, 2023).

2.3.6. Research Gap

As demonstrated above, there has been some research conducted concerning the working and living conditions within the creative industries. However, there is a clear lack of research on the values, motivations, and the interplay between the private and professional lives of dance artists. Likewise, the field of partner dance has been largely overlooked in academic literature. Importantly, despite a comprehensive review of relevant scholarship, no research examining the working and living conditions of forró dance teachers has been identified. This gap underscores the necessity of this investigation, which seeks to provide insights into the working and living conditions of forró teachers in Portugal.

3. Research Methodology

In order to explore the professional and personal realities of forró teachers in Portugal, this study adopted a qualitative research design. Qualitative interviews were conducted to enable an in-depth, participant-led exploration of key themes. Furthermore, Grounded Theory Method (GTM) served as the approach to analysis, focusing on the development of theoretical statements grounded in the data rather than the testing of pre-existing theories. The following sections provide a detailed account of the data collection process as well as the method of analysis.

3.1. Data Collection: Qualitative Interviews

This study employed one-on-one, problem-centred interviews (PCI) for data collection. A total of eight interviews were conducted, seven online and one face-to-face. All interviews were conducted in Portuguese, the interviewees' native language, to ensure ease of expression and enhance the quality of their responses. The PCI approach combines both narrative and topical interviewing, thereby enabling open-ended sharing of the respondents' experiences while ensuring that key research themes are addressed (Scheibelhofer, 2008). In the following, the process of data collection will be described more comprehensively.

3.1.1. Sampling

From the outset, the research followed the logic of GTM, meaning that data collection and analysis occurred in parallel. In the first phase of interviews, participants were selected by means of *purposive sampling*, in other words, choosing interview partners who are likely to generate rich and insightful data and have had relevant experience in the context of the study. The researcher's prior involvement in the forró community and knowledge of its dynamics facilitated field access and sampling decisions. After completing initial analysis, the sampling process shifted to be more directed, with the resulting findings shaping decisions about additional data sources, known as *theoretical sampling*³. As originally defined by Glaser and Strauss (1967, as cited in Flick, 2014, p. 155), this form of sampling is understood as "the process of data collection for generating theory whereby the analyst jointly collects, codes, and analyses his data and decides what data to collect next and where to find them."⁴ The researcher thereby aims to expand on the tentative core categories, develop its properties, and define its implications (Flick, 2014). Moreover, according to Froschauer and Lueger (2020), interviewees should be selected in a way that achieves the broadest possible range of perspectives, and those who most likely challenge preliminary assumptions. This was attempted by choosing participants who differ in gender, origin, age group, and work experience. In other words, drawing on prior knowledge of the forró teaching landscape in Portugal, the researcher selected subsequent interview participants in accordance with the principles of theoretical sampling described above.

³ Sampling method used for the second and third interview phases.

⁴ A closer examination of terminology typical in GTM is provided in 3.2.1 Terminology: Codes, Categories, and Concepts

A total of eight participants were interviewed, all of whom were actively teaching at the time of the investigation. They had the following characteristics:

- Two male and six female participants
- Four Portuguese and four Brazilian nationals
- Currently living and working as forró teachers in Portugal
- Seven residing in urban areas and one in a more rural region
- Several years of teaching experience

3.1.2. Problem-Centred Interview Approach

The PCI approach comprises both narrative and semi-structured elements, thus ideal for capturing biographical experiences and individual perspectives. The methodological flexibility of the PCI fosters a balance between non-directive narration and structured topical exploration, thereby facilitating a nuanced understanding of participants' day-to-day realities.

As delineated by Scheibelhofer (2008), PCIs usually begin with a broad, open-ended question, encouraging participants to shape their story-telling freely before moving into a more directed thematic conversation guided by the interviewer. A key strength of PCIs lies, therefore, in its ability to match depth and focus. The open-ended, narration-based component prompts interviewees to structure their responses based on their own relevance settings, thereby minimising researcher influence. In continuation, this is complemented by thematic sections, in which the interviewer introduces central issues that may not have surfaced spontaneously (Scheibelhofer, 2008).

Finally, PCIs fit well with Grounded Theory principles, where data collection and analysis occur in parallel and in an iterative process (Bryant, 2017). It follows that reflective practice throughout the investigation led to adjustments in the interview guide as new insights emerged, thereby refining thematic exploration⁵. This iterative approach facilitated remaining responsive to respondents' perspectives while maintaining a focus on the research objectives.

3.1.3. Interview Design

The interview guide was developed drawing on previous informal observations and conversations within the forró scene as well as recurring themes identified in literature on working and living conditions in the creative sector. The layout of the interviews followed a progression from broad narrative questions to more focused thematic exploration. To exemplify, each conversation began with the following open-ended prompt, "To start, can you tell me about your journey in forró and how you became a dance teacher?", inviting respondents to narrate their experiences and personal story in their own words and according to his/her relevance settings. This was succeeded by a blend of open and topic-focused questions, supporting participant-driven story-telling while

⁵ Further details in 3.1.3 *Interview Design*

staying close to the research focus. At the end of each interview, a small questionnaire was completed to contextualise the participants' responses, encompassing questions such as total working hours per week, monthly salary, and other relevant aspects.

The interviews were conducted in three distinct phases, with each stage of analysis informing subsequent interviews. The *first phase* included two initial interviews, which were transcribed and analysed immediately. This led to revisions of the interview guide, in particular, removing questions that did not prove relevant and adding others that promised deeper insights into the preliminary central themes. In the *second phase*, three additional interviews were conducted, bringing about expansion and strengthening of the code system as well as further adjustments of the interview content and structure. The *final phase* of interviews involved three more participants, mainly consolidating insights and ensuring that key themes were thoroughly explored.

3.1.4. Ethical Considerations

Ethical guidelines were followed throughout the entire research process. Before conducting the interviews, informed consent was obtained from all participants. Confidentiality was ensured by anonymising participant identities, and recordings and transcripts were securely stored. Furthermore, participation in the study was entirely voluntary, and participants were informed that they could skip any questions or withdraw from the interview at any time without consequences.

3.2. Data Analysis: Grounded Theory Method

The GTM was originally established by Glaser and Strauss (1967, as cited in Charmaz, 2014), as an alternative to grand theory testing, along the lines of 'generation' instead of 'verification' (Charmaz & Bryant, 2007). In other words, emphasis is placed on substantive theorising, that is, finding theoretical statements rooted in specific empirical contexts. Substantive theories are not intended to be claims to universal validity and absolute truth but should 'fit' and 'work' within the studied setting and be clearly retrieved from the data. Likewise, a grounded theory should remain 'modifiable' in response to additional findings (Bryant, 2017).

Since its introduction, GTM has evolved into a family of approaches that share core features (Charmaz & Bryant, 2007). Put in general terms, GTM is the process of moving from the complex and varied realities of the social setting under study to a more abstract and focused understanding of central patterns of that setting, producing a conceptual model that serves as a foundation for further research and analysis. This comprises a set of stages that, according to Bryant (2017), start off with motivation and a starting point, continue with identification of sources of data, initial analysis and an increasingly focused progress of iteration, reverting to further identification of data sources and, finally, leading to subsequent analysis with increasing levels of abstraction. The fundamental techniques associated with this theoretical progress are coding, memo writing, and integrating various forms of sampling (Bryant, 2017).

At the core of GTM lies the persistent interaction with data by the researcher, as well as the continuous involvement in emerging analyses. It is an iterative process where data collection and analysis progress simultaneously; each part informs the other and each step informs the next (Charmaz & Bryant, 2007; Flick, 2014). Bryant and Charmaz (2007, p. 1) capture this procedure succinctly in their introduction: “The iterative process of moving back and forth between empirical data and emerging analysis makes the collected data progressively more focused and the analysis successively more theoretical.” At the heart of theory development is the principle of constant comparison⁶, which drives the advancement and refinement of conceptual categories. Through systematic and comparative engagement with the data, the researcher identifies patterns or higher-level abstractions, which take the form of codes and categories. In the process of categorisation a number of instances are grouped together because they share some common property (Bryant, 2017). In continuation, substantive conceptualisations are achieved when researchers find a balance between ‘grounding’⁷ and ‘distancing’ (Bryant & Charmaz, 2007). The latter is closely connected to the concept of abduction⁸, a kind of intuitive reasoning that pushes the researcher to explore alternative explanations and abstractions. As Urquhart (2022) remarks, GTM is not simply a method for applying codes to qualitative data; it is essentially a strategy for building meaningful relationships between codes, categories and concepts, in other words, for producing theoretical statements.

Another aspect central and critical to the approach is openness in the process, namely, building conceptual categories grounded in what the data reveal without a predefined theoretical lens. Researchers have to “concentrate on what people do and the meanings they make of their actions and on the situations in which they are involved” (Flick, 2014, p. 154). In a nutshell, GTM offers demanding yet flexible guidelines that start with exploring and analysing the participants’ narratives openly, and in continuation require analytical abstraction, with the goal of constructing theoretical statements grounded in the gathered data (Flick, 2014). The objective of this approach is to “pursue developing a category rather than covering a specific empirical topic” (Charmaz, 2014, p. 15).

Furthermore, the process of grounded theorising must be understood in view of the idea that “research is itself an active and social process” (Bryant, 2017). In contrast to classic GTM, which views data as something to be discovered, a constructivist version of GTM was adopted in this study. The latter “assumes that neither data nor theories are discovered, but researchers construct them as a result of their interactions with their participants and emerging analyses” (Flick, 2014, p. 154). This perspective recognises that theoretical statements emerge through the interpretative lens of the researcher, shaped by socio-cultural contexts, personal worldview, and the interactions that unfold during research (Flick, 2014).

⁶ Ongoing comparison of data with data, data with code, code with code, code with category, and category with category as well as (re-)grouping codes and categories.

⁷ grounded in the data

⁸ Further details see section 3.2.4 *Theoretical Coding & Theorising*

GTM was chosen for this study due to its capacity to generate insights in areas where existing knowledge is scarce or fragmented. As noted above, GTM is not about applying preconceived frameworks, but rather about allowing conceptual categories to emerge from the participants' lived experiences. Subsequently, as the social realities of dance teachers remain underexplored, it is essential to be able to adapt to unexpected results that may surface in the course of data collection. The iterative nature and methodological flexibility of GTM permit the study's research focus to evolve as patterns and insights emerge. In the words of Bryant (2017, p.156), "GTM offers a robust and adaptable method if it is used with intelligence and insight." In conclusion, qualitative research driven by a grounded theory approach is particularly well-suited for this study, which explores the conditions and interactions of the professional and private lives of *forró* teachers. As such, this approach is capable of uncovering important discourses and nuances of working as a dance professional that may be obscured in large-scale studies.

3.2.1. Terminology: Codes, Categories, and Concepts

In GTM, the central terms used in the analytical process can vary across different authors. Consequently, it is critical to define them within the context of this study.

A *code* is a label that captures patterns and themes and group them under a 'title', thereby establishing a relationship with the data and the participants. Codes are always provisional, which means that the ones determined in the early stages of the analysis and will often not last in the same form throughout later stages of the project. Nonetheless, they serve as the initial building blocks and are essential products for informing more abstract concepts in subsequent stages of the process (Bryant, 2017; Bryant & Charmaz, 2007).

A *category* is a higher-level code that has grown in complexity and abstraction through a process of constant comparison. Categories can be regarded as "containers for related data, where some properties are common to all those within a category", thereby subsuming other codes (Bryant, 2017, p. 119). At the same time, following Glaser and Strauss (1967, as cited in Bryant, 2017), categories function as conceptual elements of a theory, identifying relations between substantive codes and enabling researchers to formulate theoretical statements (Bryant, 2017; Bryant & Charmaz, 2007).

Finally, the term *concept* represents a more refined idea and operates at a higher level of abstraction than both codes and categories. Moving from codes to categories and then to concepts can be understood as the phases in the progression of theoretical elaboration (Bryant, 2017).

3.2.2. Process of Analysis

Building upon the preceding chapters, the analytical process within GTM does not start from a clear and precise research question, but rather with an initial idea that a certain social phenomenon holds potential to be an interesting topic of study. This approach favours an open approach to the research context and a flexible stance on part of the researcher; during early stages of GTM there is at best a tentative idea of a boundary for the investigation. Figure 3.1 displays the research process as it was employed in this study. The initial data was drawn along the lines of purposive sampling. The researcher's own experience as well as informal conversations and

informal observations prior to the study informed the choice for the first-round sample of interviewees. As outlined in chapter 3.1.3 *Interview Design*, interviews were conducted in three phases. After each interview, the audio recordings were transcribed using AI-supported transcription software⁹ and then carefully checked manually. The respective transcripts served as the basis for the coding process, which was carried out using MAXQDA¹⁰. Using computer software aids in data management, i.e. sort, merge, and cluster codes, and enables quick access to all instances of a given code. It is important to note, however, that all coding actions were performed manually, ensuring the research process remained fully under the control of the researcher.

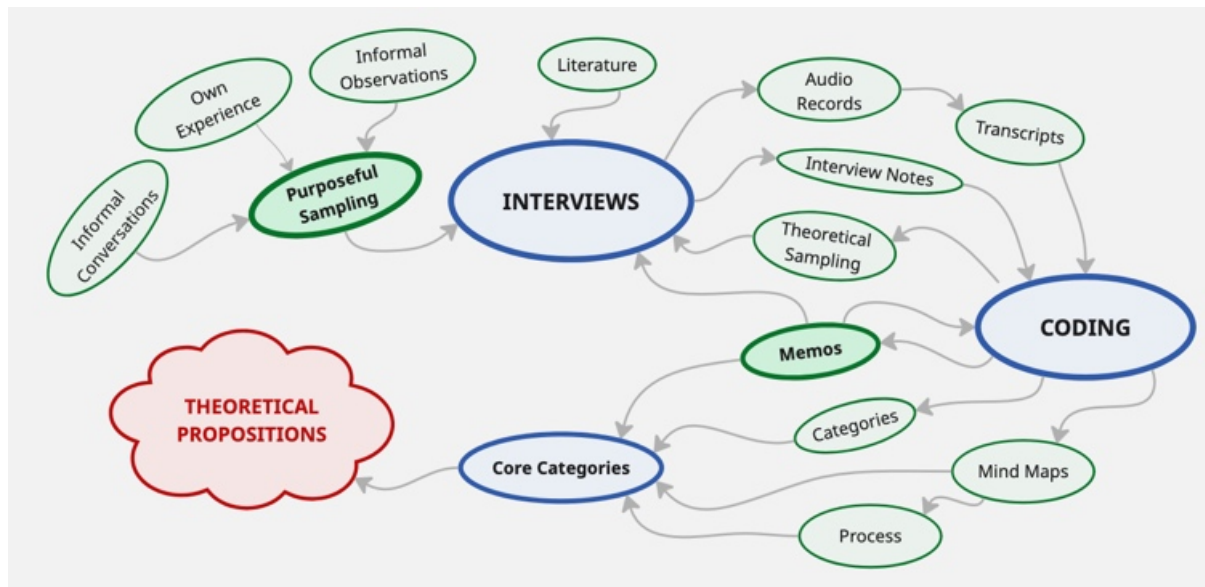


Figure 3.1 The research process. Own representation, inspired by Drexler (2012, as cited in Bryant, 2017, p. 89)

The first round of gathered data was processed through open coding¹¹. Based on this first analysis and the emerging codes, first preliminary categories were established. The subsequent stage of the investigation was directed by these initial codes, and further data gathering was guided by the principles of theoretical sampling (i.e. second interview phase). Moving forward, analysis took place in the form of focused coding¹⁰, which informed a third phase of sampling, interviewing, and refinement of codes and categories. In this phase, as categories became well-established and data mainly reinforced the existing categories, the focus increasingly shifted towards theoretical coding¹². In other words, working on conceptualisations that account for the categories and relationships between them. Special emphasis was placed on the core concepts, which can be understood as the dominant idea that integrates more detailed levels of codes and categories. This serves as the foundation for elaboration of a substantive theoretical proposition, the validity of which is derived from the context in which the theory is situated.

⁹ www.turboscribe.ai

¹⁰ www.maxqda.com

¹¹ More details see chapter 3.2.3 *Initial & Focused Coding*

¹² More details see chapter 3.2.4 *Theoretical Coding & Theorising*

In the context of this study, emphasis in the analysis was put on what was being said (content), rather than a detailed examination of the underlying meaning and how exactly participants expressed themselves (hermeneutical analysis)¹³. Furthermore, even though interviews were conducted in Portuguese, coding as well as memo writing was carried out in English, thereby facilitating the iterative aspect of GTM, thesis writing, and consultations with the supervisor.

Throughout the entire research process, *memo-writing* accompanied and guided subsequent research stages as well as analytical development. This practice is a core aspect of GTM and can be seen as a bridge between data gathering and theory construction (Bryant, 2017). Through memo-writing, researchers gain analytical distance from the data and the identified codes, thereby facilitating a more abstract thinking and integration of their ideas. Moreover, conceptualising data in narrative form creates a collection of analytical reflections that can be sorted, ordered, and reordered. Importantly, as with codes and categories, memos are considered provisional and modifiable, always open to reassessment and adaption (Flick, 2014). In this study, the memo function in MAXQDA proved especially valuable, enabling the integration of notes with codes and categories in real time. As represented in Flick (2014, p.163) memos can include:

- working definitions of codes or categories
- comparisons between data and between codes and categories
- identified gaps or vagueness in categories
- hunches, questions, or conjectures to be checked out and further investigated in the empirical research
- fresh ideas and newly created concepts
- comparisons between categories and a range of theoretical codes, and the use of theoretical codes to suggest and investigate possible relations between categories and how categories might be integrated into a modifiable GT
- comparisons with and links to relevant literature

Finally, many GTM scholars emphasise that if one has carefully and consistently written memos throughout the research process, these can, once organised, provide the basis for the eventual presentation of results (Bryant & Charmaz, 2007).

In continuation, this following section will take a closer look at *coding* as it finds application in GTM and, hence, in this study. According to Charmaz (2006, as cited in Flick, 2014, p. 156) coding is about “naming segments of data with a label that simultaneously categorizes, summarizes, and accounts for each piece of data.” Urquhart (2022) adds that by labelling particular segments of data, we begin to analyse that data. Once we start connecting these codes in relationships, we move towards theorising about the data and progressively increase abstraction.

¹³ In addition to unsuitability for this study, it would be inappropriate to conduct this kind of analysis in a language other than the researcher’s mother tongue.

The difficulty often lies in going beyond simply describing the data, to applying more analytical codes (Urquhart, 2022). Another crucial analytical step in GTM is designating certain categories as having overriding significance. The researcher aims to specify “the properties of the category, the conditions under which it is operative, the conditions under which it changes, and its relation to other categories” (Bryant, 2017, p. 121). In the final stage of inquiry, the most significant categories are elevated to become the key concepts of the emerging theory. Thus, while initial coding may be broad and unconstrained, the later stages of research become more anchored in and guided by the evolving analysis. Figure 3.2 illustrates the analytical progress of GTM as a spiral that moves simultaneously in two directions: *inward* towards the origin as a vast number of codes is condensed into a few core concepts, and *upward* towards one to three core categories that encapsulate significant aspects of the inquiry due to their explanatory strength. The large number of codes at the bottom of the spiral are explored

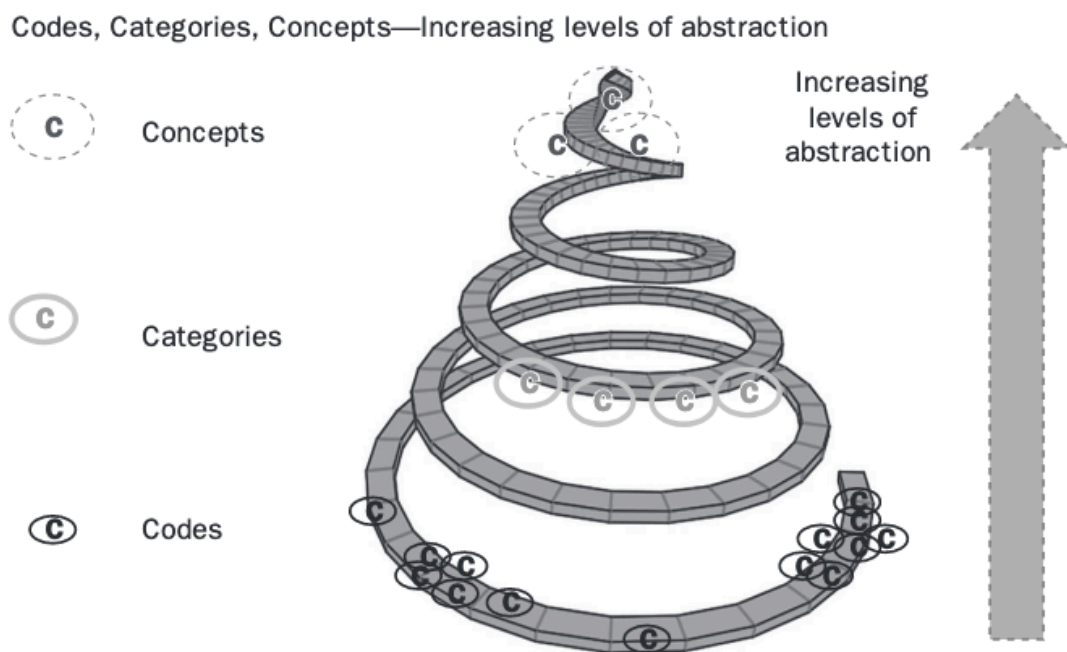


Figure 3.2 The Spiral Model of Abstraction (Bryant, 2017, p. 97)

using constant comparison. The researcher then groups some or all of these into a smaller set of *focused codes* or *categories*. These more focused codes should provide a deeper level of abstraction and conceptualisation compared to the initial open codes, bringing together important features of the lower-level ones; while strengthening and expanding on their overall conceptual and explanatory depth. These higher-level codes serve as the foundation for theoretical sampling (for more details, see 3.1.1. Sampling), which leads to further refinement of these codes. The hereby established categories inform further theoretical sampling and analysis, leading to the identification of one or two core concepts, which provide the basis for the formulation of a substantive grounded theory. It is important to note that the results of all coding activities should be assessed according to the usefulness of the resulting abstractions, not their “correctness”. There is no right or wrong set of codes; only those that prove beneficial in formulating an explanation of some social setting (Bryant, 2017).

In line with the ideas presented above, coding in practice is based on a systematic process of categorisation (Bryant, 2017), and consists of three phases: initial coding, focused coding, and theoretical coding (Charmaz,

2014). Despite the fact that initial coding is mainly done in the early stages of analysis, the coding process itself is not linear. Instead, researchers move back and forth between coding phases to stay responsive to theoretical possibilities. Different GTM scholars employ different coding strategies, nevertheless, all highlight the importance of staying close to the data and asking generic questions to guide the analytical process (Bryant, 2017; Flick, 2014):

➔ **What is this data about?**

Essentially emphasising keeping an open mind, not assuming that the meaning of the data is readily apparent. Lynn Davie (1996, as cited in Bryant & Charmaz, 2007, p. 330) highlights that “the most difficult skill in learning to do qualitative analysis is the ability to see what is in the data”.

➔ **What is this data a study off?**

In many instances, grounded theorists noted that data collected with one issue or idea in mind lead into unforeseen directions as inquiry unfolded. Therefore, it is essential to remain open to amending the intended research topic, thereby enabling the investigation of potentially important issues that surface. This study experienced these dynamics. The initial idea was to focus on the economic side of the working and living conditions of forró teachers (income sources, employment conditions, role of the Portuguese welfare state, etc). Nevertheless, in the first phase of interviews, it became clear that ‘passion-driven profession’ and ‘challenging working and living conditions’ are central themes for the participants.

➔ **What are people saying?**

Researchers should go beyond the descriptions offered by interviewees; they must adopt a sceptical view of what people say, what they actually mean, and what they omit.

Subsequently, in order to gain a clearer understanding of the coding process as employed in this study, the following two chapters will delve deeper into the three phases of coding: initial, focused, and theoretical coding.

3.2.3. Initial & Focused Coding

As discussed above, central to *initial coding* is breaking down the gathered data into discrete parts, closely inspecting them, and assessing them for similarities and differences. This coding stage serves as a point of departure “to see the direction in which to take [this] study” (Glaser, 1978, as cited in Saldaña, 2015, p. 101). Therefore, it is imperative for the researcher to stay responsive to any possible route suggested by the interpretation of the data. Similarly, every assigned code has to fit the data, instead of forcing the data to fit the code. Flick (2014, p. 156) offers a set of analytical questions to support the researcher in defining what is happening in the data and looking at the data critically:

- What category does this incident indicate?
- What is the participant’s main concern?
- What process(es) is at issue here?
- How can I define it?
- How does the research participant(s) act and profess to think and feel while involved in this process?

All codes proposed during this first cycle are tentative and provisional; some codes may be reworded as analysis proceeds (Saldaña, 2015). This open-ended approach first constructs descriptive codes, which are then transformed into more analytical codes, or categories, as the researcher reflects and decides what is of importance (Urquhart, 2022). Through the principle of constant comparison, initial codes get sorted and clustered. This process may lead to revision of existing codes as well as creation of more elaborate categories by merging similar or overlapping codes (Flick, 2014).

In the process of *focused coding*, the researcher derives a limited set of the most significant or frequent initial codes that make the most analytical sense. Compared to initial codes, they are more directed, selective and conceptual. Another key step in this progression is to identify and select one to three core categories¹⁴, which indicate “the most significant and frequent code that is also related to as many other codes as possible and more than other candidates for the core category” (Flick, 2014, p. 158). Simultaneously, this process involves assigning tentative conceptual definitions to these categories and exploring relationships between them (Flick, 2014).

For the first phase of interviews, this study applied a sentence-by-sentence coding approach. In particular, it involved labelling words, lines and segments of data, thereby minimising the chance of missing an important category (Bryant, 2017). Such a careful reading and coding is one of the strengths of GTM, through which unique contributions to the research area are created (Flick, 2014). At the initial level of coding, a vast amount of codes are produced. Making use of MAXQDA’s creative coding option (a mapping tool), these were organised, allowing for the formation of first categories and connections. Colours were used to differentiate provisional categories from codes. Grouping and regrouping codes visually as well articulating my ideas in the form of memos lead to the emergence of two tentative core categories. At this point, the research focus gained clarity, and further data gathering was informed by the issues that had surfaced in the first stage of analysis.

In the subsequent two phases of interviews and analysis, incident-by-incident coding was used. This approach primarily focuses on data segments that are logically connected content wise, rather than isolated details like individual lines or words. During this second stage of the study, some new codes were added, adjustments were made to the organisation of codes, and meaningful sub-categories that stand in relation to the core categories were created. In addition, some categories established at earlier stages were rejected, as they no longer offered significant contributions to the emerging key themes of the study. The two previously identified core categories, ‘passion-driven profession’ and ‘challenging working and living conditions’, were corroborated in this second phase and elevated to tentative core concepts. The reason being that they appear frequently in the data, more precisely, “within all or almost all cases, there are indicators pointing to that concept, and the explanation that evolves by relating the categories is logical and consistent” (Drexler, 2012, as cited in Bryant, 2017, p.201). These

¹⁴ Classical GTM (Glaser, 1978, as cited in Flick, 2014) emphasises the identification of a single core category. Proponents of constructivist GTM, however, argue that deriving two or three central categories can also be appropriate (Bryant & Charmaz, 2007).

insights, as just mentioned, delimited and guided further theoretical sampling, thus, the third phase of interviews and coding. Furthermore, throughout the entire coding process, in-vivo coding was used occasionally and when suited, offering insights directly from the respondents themselves. These codes deserve special attention as its use reinforces the authenticity of data interpretation.

3.2.4. Theoretical Coding & Theorising

Theoretical coding constitutes a key step in formulating a substantive grounded theory. It builds on the findings from initial and focused coding, emphasising the identification of properties and dimensions of the categories that have emerged (Saldaña, 2015). The goal is to move towards a conceptual integration, namely, cohesive theoretical statements that ‘earned’ their way into the analysis, because they fit the data and previously generated codes (Thornberg et al., 2011). According to Charmaz (2006, as cited in Flick, 2014, p.159f) theoretical codes are ideas, terms or abstract models that “specify possible relationships between categories you have developed in your focused coding ... [and] may help you tell an analytic story that has coherence.” Moreover, *abductive reasoning* plays a crucial role in constructivist GTM¹⁵. It involves pursuing the most plausible explanation, one that accounts for the emergent categories better than any other possible hypothesis (Flick, 2014). Importantly, these interpretations always remain provisional and open to revision in light of new data or more robust theoretical explanations (Flick, 2014). Furthermore, at this stage of theorising, pre-existing theoretical concepts from literature may also be employed as a source of possible and ‘non-imposing’ seeing and interpretations of the findings. Accordingly, due to their relevance and fit with the lived realities reflected in the data, the concept of ‘*precarity*’ was incorporated as analytic lens to illuminate relationships between central categories and support theory building without overriding it (Thornberg et al., 2011).

While theoretical saturation was not pursued in full measure due to the limited scope of a Master thesis, data from the final interview phase mainly reinforced the established categories, suggesting that further theoretical sampling would likely not generate new categories (Bryant, 2017). As a final remark in this chapter on GTM, the thesis draws on Bryant's (2017, p. 131) reflection: “The path to theoretical coding is fraught with difficulties—again one of those aspects of GTM that has been termed ‘simple and straightforward’ but that is in fact complex and demanding.”

3.3. Positionality Statement

I am a white Austrian woman and active member of the forró community in Portugal. My involvement in the scene not only granted me valuable access to interview participants, but also offered prior knowledge of the field and its specific challenges. This insider perspective informed both the design and focus of the study, while also demanding continuous reflection on my role as both participant and researcher.

¹⁵ In contrast, classical GTM is classified as an inductive method (Bryant & Charmaz, 2007).

3.4. Limitations & Evaluation

Given the scope and limited possibilities of the master thesis, it is not the aim to construct a veritable grand theory. Rather, it offers conceptual ideas grounded in the real experiences and narratives of the participants. The study's goal was to gain awareness of key dynamics in the working and living conditions of forró teachers in Portugal, without claiming broader generalisability.

Validity checks are sometimes seen as weakness in GTM. However, in accordance with the Pragmatist view of a theory or model, importance is placed on its use in the context from which it is derived, as opposed to universal truth and applicability (Bryant, 2017). Glaser (1998, as cited in Flick, 2014, p.167) proposes the following four criteria to judge the quality of a study employing GTM:

- (1) Workability - Does the theory work to explain relevant behaviour in the substantive area of the research?
- (2) Relevance - Does it have relevance to the people in the substantive field?
- (3) Fit - Does the theory fit the substantive area?
- (4) Modifiability - Is it readily modifiable as new data emerge?

In a similar vein, Charmaz (2006, as cited in Flick, 2014, p.167) synthesises them into a more compact form: "Does the completed analysis fulfil the criteria of credibility, originality, resonance, and usefulness?"

Turning to another aspect, many GTM texts discourage engagement with existing literature in the first place and emphasise that researchers should enter the investigation without preconceptions. On the contrary, Bryant (2017) argues that in many cases it is precisely personal experience within a field that draws researchers to a particular topic. Therefore, preconceptions often contribute positively in guiding and sensitising the researcher to the context of inquiry. The researcher's skill lies in building on that expertise, while staying open to new insights and unexpected directions. Summarised succinctly, they need to enter the field "with an open mind, but not an empty head" (Bryant, 2017, p. 220). Lastly, it needs to be acknowledged that engaging in the analytic process as a group could strengthen the generation of abstract concepts, open up more possibilities, and enable a higher precision.

4. Results

The findings revealed two central themes: (1) forró teaching is a *passion-driven profession*, and (2) the *living conditions of artists are challenging*. Participants described forró not merely as a job, but as a lifestyle that shapes their identity and everyday life. While forró offers personal fulfilment and a sense of accomplishment, teachers also face considerable obstacles, such as difficulties in maintaining a work-life balance and the demands of using their bodies as working tools. The following chapters will explore these aspects in detail.

4.1. Passion-Driven Profession

For the participants, working with forró is a deliberate choice to pursue their passion; “*working with something that I like*” (I6) is of great importance to them. All interviewees feel strongly attracted to the dance, the music, the culture, the community, in essence, everything connected to forró. It reflects a deep intrinsic motivation and a genuine love for their profession; passion is the driving force behind their work:

“I had a second job. Then I threw my hands in the air and thought, ‘you know what?’ I’m going to make a living doing what I love.” (I4) ¹⁶

“I also chose forró over [the other career], didn’t I? Because I feel so free when I’m dancing and, as a result, I felt more like myself. And that was actually the biggest factor in my decision. It made me feel more complete.” (I5)

To exemplify, there was a lot of mention of the desire to keep the ‘forró movement’ and ‘forró culture’ alive, suggesting that their interest goes beyond simply teaching dance. At the heart of their work lies a commitment to creating and sustaining a respectful, welcoming, and caring community.

4.1.1. Forró as a Key Component of Life

It became clear in all interviews that working with forró is an important piece and takes up a significant part in the participants’ lives. Many hours per week are dedicated to forró, and even during their time ‘out of work’, respondents reported constantly thinking about it. This leads to blurred boundaries between private and professional life as well as a tendency to prioritise work obligations and accept overwork¹⁷. In the words of the participants:

“There isn’t a single day in the week without forró [...] everything I think about, everything I live, from the moment I wake up; forró is in everything, everything.” (I3)

¹⁶ All quotes were translated from Portuguese to English using AI translation tools and were then thoroughly revised by the researcher.

"I decided I would live 100% for forró. So today, forró is my life, it's how I make a living, it's my lifestyle, it's how I see the world, it's where I draw my life lessons from." (I4)

Observations from the interviews also suggest that the participants have one single work-life identity. Their lives are oriented around forró, and their personal identity is both reflected in and shaped by their teaching. In other words, their professional role cannot be separated from their personal self:

"Forró is my personal life. I don't really have a personal life, you know? Everything is about forró [...] I think I've stopped making that distinction. My personal life is completely tied to forró, always." (I7)

As a result, in their work as forró teachers they put great emphasis on staying true to their personal values, and in passing these values on to their students. For them, forró teaching is educating beyond dancing, including, for example, challenging machismo in partner dancing and promoting active following. Some respondents mentioned avoiding events or contracts that did not align with their ethical or personal standards. Among the values frequently highlighted were being respectful to each other (e.g. no flirtation during classes or sexual harassment in general) and being inclusive within the dance community (e.g. towards older dancers, beginners, and less conventionally attractive individuals).

Furthermore, as already touched upon, forró is not just the participants' profession, but it shapes how they mount their life. It is more than a hobby, more than a job; it is their 'estilo de vida' (way of living) and a major source of motivation. Consequently, forró tends to come first, with other aspects of life accommodated around and integrated into it. To give an example, most participants shared that their friends and partners are part of the forró community, once again blurring the line between personal and professional life. This was expressed poignantly in many ways:

"Forró changed my life, it's my lifestyle and it's everything to me." (I4)

"Everything I've done has been through dance. It's the most powerful thing in my life... I shower thinking about dance, I fall asleep thinking about it [...] my life is all about eating, drinking, sleeping, and living dance." (I1)

"Being a forrozeiro is a lifestyle. It's like going to the store, picking out clothes and thinking, 'But can I dance forró in this?' If not, I'm not buying it." (I7)

"At this point, forró is more than just my job; it's where I have my community of friends, including my boyfriend, right? Everyone I'm close to is there [...] it's a very important part of my emotional life as well." (I8)

Aside from my family, it's hard to think of anyone, any friend, who isn't from the forró scene. Sure, that can have its drawbacks sometimes, but most of the time it's just... really great." (I6)

4.1.2. Purposeful Work and Feeling Accomplished

For the participants, their work is not merely a profession but a means to enact meaningful change, i.e. change the world through forró. Many expressed the aspiration to give something (empowering) to their students¹⁸, while also creating a space where community members feel welcomed, connected, and safe (to express themselves). Some of the interviewees described forró as a powerful 'tool', or even a 'weapon' for a transformative impact that extends beyond the dancing into the personal lives of their students. Their experiences include empowering introverted individuals with low self-confidence and supporting both their personal evolution as well as their evolution as a social actor within the community. Other ambitions mentioned include empowering followers (e.g. by promoting active following), talking about gender roles in partner dance, breaking old patterns of discrimination against women, and in general fighting for gender equality, both for dancers and for dance professionals. These aspirations reflect how closely their work aligns with their personal values. A strong emphasis was also placed on inclusivity, especially toward older dancers and beginners. To illustrate, in the words of the participants:

"I know how important forró is, I know how it can change lives [...] and we do end up changing people's lives, even if just a little. There are students who couldn't even make eye contact, and now, I don't know, they've got a line of people wanting to dance with them, and they're totally outgoing. That's what forró gave them, isn't it?" (I2)

"I think that's the most rewarding part of being a forró teacher, using dance as a tool for socialising and helping people build healthier social relationships [...] I've discovered that forró fosters a wide range of personal skills." (I8)

"What's most rewarding is seeing people challenge themselves and break through barriers, patterns, and limiting beliefs, and begin to trust themselves [...] people who sometimes struggle with social skills, people who are very shy, who feel lonely, or are facing psychological difficulties, and they tell us that dance and the classes have healed many of their wounds." (I4)

"It's about giving people support. Because when you're working with someone who has no sense of rhythm, no posture, who's never danced, who's afraid, who lacks confidence, who has low self-esteem, that's the responsibility of the teacher [...] the change I bring to each person's life. That's the best part." (I1)

At the same time, the analysis showed that the interviewees experience a lot of self-fulfilment and self-realisation through their work with forró; it gives the possibility for social, creative, and physical stimulus. Moreover, they feel accomplished through their work, in realising the joy and happiness forró and their classes bring to others.

¹⁸ This can be within classes, at socials, organising events for the community, and also online.

Another aspect mentioned as very rewarding and fulfilling is accompanying the students' progression, not only in their dance skills, but also in their personal, emotional, and social processes. This is conveyed powerfully in the following quotes:

"I feel so accomplished, you know? So grateful to be able to work with something I deeply love, something that feels natural to me, that makes sense, and to use it as a tool to help change the world, to support people through their struggles and challenges. So, I feel a deep sense of gratitude towards forró and towards art, for allowing us to reach people through it [...] forró really is a very powerful tool." (I2)

"For me, what gives meaning, what convinces me every day to keep doing what I do is recognising that, in every stage, there has always been someone whose life I felt I had a positive impact on [...] the meaning of forró, for me, is bringing joy to people in whatever way makes sense to them." (I4)

"It's the motivation, the sense of wellbeing that the class brings to people's lives, not just getting them to dance, you know? And honestly, sometimes I get messages that make me think: maybe I wasn't put in this world just to teach forró, but to try to help bring about good, you know?" (I7)

4.1.3. Dedication and Commitment

The interviews clearly revealed that participants have invested significant energy and dedication into their passion, that is, their forró dance education. Each of them described periods in their lives where dancing took up an intensive amount of time and attention. Even now, their profession is characterised by a high level of commitment, determination, and intrinsic motivation:

"Over the years, there have been many sources that have nourished my knowledge, so that I could pass it on to my students, right? So, a researcher all the time. At every moment, looking for new information, talking to people and understanding different contexts, right? There's a lot of invisible work, but it's what shapes me into a better person and teacher each time. I hope so. But that's it. Research is happening all the time." (I4)

In addition, there is a strong drive to do high-quality, professional work, precisely because forró is their passion. It follows that participants strive for continuous improvement, that is, seeking better ways to give their classes and engaging in ongoing personal development as dancers and educators. In most cases, this is not seen as a burden but as an exciting and necessary process. Similarly, the interviews revealed an emotion-driven sensitivity regarding the quality of forró classes in general; misbehaviour and unprofessional practices by other teachers upset them, as they are passionate about and genuinely wish the best for the forró movement.

I always want to learn more to improve the lessons nowadays [...] I was researching more theoretical things, more information, more curiosities, you know? You're always thinking, or even the same lesson, for example, one I've already given and will give again — I changed

it completely, you know? Because sometimes I'm not that satisfied giving the same thing, or I want to add something, so it's always, I'm always thinking, right? So, I'm always thinking, always adapting and changing things."

I always make a point of studying all the styles, because I have to keep myself up to date, right?" (I1)

4.1.4. Gratitude

A striking element across several interviews was the strong sense of gratitude, on the one hand, toward me as the researcher for exploring the forró culture in depth and shedding light on the underrepresented reality of forró professionals. More importantly, however, the participants expressed deep gratitude toward the forró movement itself and for the opportunity to work with something they love. Moreover, in many cases, forró has been a compensatory activity or escape in difficult periods of their life, positively influenced their mental health, and facilitated meaningful friendships.

"Forró is a constant exchange, you know? It touched me deeply, and still does, but it also taught me how to pass that feeling on to others, how to spread it like oxytocin, like a rumour of happiness, and so on [...] forró has meant so many things to me. It's been my healing, it's been the relief from my daily worries, it's been so much already." (I4)

Along these lines, they themselves have also experienced empowerment through forró. Their experience as dance teachers contributed to their personal growth, offering them new knowledge, wisdom, and different perspectives. This process shaped both their identity and their lifestyle. For instance, some women expressed how teaching solo increased their self-confidence and ability to lead. There was also recognition that teaching is not a one-way process, the teachers themselves learn from their students. Moreover, being valued for their dancing and teaching skills has in turn contributed to greater self-esteem:

"When I entered this world, I changed a lot. I changed a lot in terms of confidence, in being able to stand in front of people, to speak in public. That now, for me, is second nature." (I6)

4.2. Difficult Artist Life Conditions

The interviews revealed that general working and living conditions for dance professionals, as well as maintaining a work-life balance, are challenging. Nevertheless, the respondents accept aspects such as *correria* (stress/hustle, I4), overworking, discrimination, and *luta dura* (hard fight, I1) because their intrinsic motivation and love for forró are so strong; passion is the answer to everything. Nevertheless, some teachers voiced that they have the feeling of working a lot for very little. Big parts of their working activities are invisible and thus often overlooked when evaluating their profession or negotiating remuneration for teaching activities. These invisible tasks include administrative work, class preparation, communication/publicity/social media, organising tasks, continuous education in dance/culture/methodology, meetings, and community involvement.

"I have to work really hard, and considering that, we earn very little. No one pays for the time we actually spend working." (I1)

"That depends if it's formal work, or if it's those other things, the invisible jobs, because I feel like I work all day long." (I4)

"I'm here, living from what I love, with some bumps along the way, some hurdles we need to get over, but with a lot of truth, with all my heart. And for me, the best and biggest choice of my life was forró. Forró changed my life, it's my way of life and everything to me." (I4)

Furthermore, working as a dance professional for many years can be exhausting. Several interviewees indicated that few remain in the profession throughout their entire working life. To illustrate:

"I can't see myself working as a forró teacher until I'm 60. Maybe that's not even what I want, because I know how exhausting it is, physically and mentally. Physically, in the sense of trying to always stay at the top for so long. Because I also understand the body's limitations." (I6)

Most participants started working with forró as a side job before transitioning fully, although they wished they could have pursued their passion from the beginning. Working as a forró teacher usually provides comparatively low financial returns, frequently combined with high fluctuations and risks. One example is the constant worry about having enough students to cover costs and make a living. These factors impede dance professionals from dedicating themselves exclusively to teaching forró, or if they do so, from focusing on enhancing the quality of their teaching.

"The fear that comes with trying to live through art, something all of us in the arts go through, made me hesitate to fully commit to forró. I always kept it running alongside everything else in life." (I4)

"It's really hard to live the dance journey, to be a teacher and be known enough that you can live off it comfortably. Without that constant worry, that hustle of needing to have students before you can feel at ease. It's a very difficult path." (I7)

In continuation, one interviewee illustrates the tension between having a calling and a passion, and the significant hardships encountered when dedicating oneself fully to working with dance, including financial insecurity, lack of professional recognition, irregular schedules, and uncertainty about medium- and long-term stability:

"No one can really manage to live off it [professional dance] unless you were born to be a dance teacher [...] sorry for being so blunt, but life isn't easy, not at all. But I've got nothing to complain about. I would never, ever trade my life for another. I wouldn't know how to be anything else. I was born for this. I'll die doing this. But it's not an easy life, not at all. No." (I1)

Another major influencing factor mentioned was the lack of support from family and/or society. The latter refers to the general lack of (monetary) valorisation of work in the creative sector. Often, working as a dance professional or teacher is not regarded as a 'proper' profession by large parts of society. As a result of this, several interviewees had difficulties to adopt and fully accept the profession and the label 'dance teacher' for themselves. They also reported experiences of disrespectful behaviour toward them as artists, such as unfair contract proposals. Nonetheless, many interview partners underlined the beneficial attributes dancing and the creative sector more broadly hold for society and for general (mental) well-being, thereby emphasising the need for a shift in perception and valorisation of creative work. As described above, forró has the power to heal, boost self-esteem, and promote a healthy body. Whats more, some doctors have even started prescribing dance as 'medicine' for various (mental) health conditions.

"For me, it clicked straight away, this is important, this really is important. We've [author's note: we = society] been undervaluing it, and it matters. It's not even about learning, it's just about being. Being with people, spending time together, learning new things, yes, listening to music, playing around." (I8)

"You won't find a teacher in this world who has money, because no one values the teacher's work." (I1)

Some interviewees emphasised that they deliberately prioritise their values over monetary gain. For instance, they reported rejecting certain work opportunities or event collaborations related to dance when the offered conditions did not adequately reflect the true value of their work, choosing instead to earn money outside the artistic field:

"Sometimes I stop working... I stop doing this work because it's not valued [...] to avoid feeding into that cycle, that path." (I3)

Similarly, there is a lack of recognition and valorisation of the background and energy behind artistic work, particularly with regard to their students' appreciation. This refers to all the invisible work, among others, years of education, class preparation, and what one respondent described as *luta dura* (hard fight, I1), referring to the dedication and hard work invested in building a sustainable career, as well as the ongoing struggle with obstacles, uncertainty and instability. One interviewee summarised this on point:

"Life is tough. I go through a lot as a teacher. It's not easy. Sometimes you've got 20, 30, 40 [students], everyone... But no one sees when you've only got two [students]. When you spent years with four, five [students], going here, there, everywhere. No one sees that. That's the background, behind the scenes [...] it's a hard struggle. Really, really hard." (I1)

Interestingly, there also seems to be a common misunderstanding in broader society that passion-driven professionals are always enjoying what they do, simply because it is also their hobby. Since forró is often associated with leisure, as students engage in it during their free time, people tend to perceive it as inherently

pleasurable for the teachers as well. However, it is passion-driven WORK, and certain tasks and time periods that are experienced as tiring or unpleasant by dance teachers:

"Sometimes we don't feel like dancing, but we have to, because it's our job. So, it's not always leisure. And on a personal level, sometimes those lines get a bit blurred, with people feeling like everything is always amazing for us. But no, there are times when we also need a break from forró [...] of course, there's the other side, which is that forró, or dance in general, is leisure for most people. So, because it's leisure for them, they feel like it doesn't cost anything, or that it should be offered for free. And that's where it gets difficult, people don't always realise that for professionals, it's work. It requires study, it takes time, and sometimes it's time we don't want to give, but have to." (I6)

"People get confused because it's a job where we're happy doing what we do, it's enjoyable, it's full of feel-good hormones, and they mistake that for leisure [...] since we're in a setting that's leisure for a lot of people, many think I'm living a life of leisure, you know? I love what I do, I really do, but there are plenty of things I have to do as a teacher that I don't love." (I4)

To conclude, when asked, "What are the biggest obstacles or challenges you encounter in your work as a forró teacher?", one participant's (I4) first response was, "Many [laughter]." This response captures the general tendency among participants to describe their work as marked by a wide array of challenges, including financial strain, irregular schedules, lack of professional valorisation, overwork, and uncertainty.

4.2.1. Lacking Work-Life Balance

Bringing together and finding a balance between private life and professional commitments proves to be challenging for the participants. Interviewees reported that their passion and motivation push them to continue working, yet they also face a continuous and demanding workload. The following statements, which respond to the interview question "How do you balance your work as a forró teacher with your personal life?", illustrate the complexity and emotional difficulty:

"I don't know, I don't know [desperate voice + laughs]. There isn't much left, right? [...] but, well, I'm very tired, every year I say I'm going to slow down more and more, but..." (I7)

"[laughs] it's really hard because I have... [laughter]. I value my work a lot, a lot, a lot. And sometimes that causes [searches for words] some conflicts in my personal life, you know? In my family life. So... I've accepted that work is going to be very important to me, and that's that. And no one needs to get upset about it. But I'm trying now to have a bit more balance in that area. Trying to spend more time with my family and so on. But my work is always here, right? Always, always, always, always, always, always [...] I commit to and try, TRY to have more time off, you know? ...let's say that. That was last year's goal, to try to have planned breaks [...] and I wasn't doing that, I find it a bit difficult." (I2)

"Well, it's a bit of a complex question, how I balance my work with my personal life, especially since I started this interview saying that forró is my life, isn't it? [...] There are times when I manage to juggle both, and times when I don't [...] nowadays, I feel like I enjoy forró less because I've been working a lot with it, so unfortunately my social life right now, my personal life, revolves a lot around work, and work in turn revolves back around personal life, so it's like they're always merged together with work." (I4)

"Aaaah, complicated [laughs]. You're working when everyone else is resting, aren't you?" (I5)

4.2.1.1. Working a Lot

A consistent theme throughout the interviews was that the participants are working a lot, that is, their time is heavily consumed by work obligations, leaving little room for truly personal activities. Similarly common were expressions of exhaustion and a desire for more rest and improved work-life balance. For those teaching at forró festivals during weekends (see 4.2.1.4. Blurred Boundaries between Private and Professional Life), in addition to their usual work activities, there are hardly any opportunities to rest during the work week. Correspondingly, interviewees with an additional job alongside their forró teaching report especially intense work weeks.

"I bloody work hard, you know, Mira? I work a lot." (I2)

"A typical week? Yeah, it's non-stop. Since I am self-employed, it's a crazy rush [...] so nowadays I make a living from forró, but with loads of work and running around... I've really had to hustle to make it pay off." (I4)

4.2.1.2. Constant Availability

Moreover, constant availability, even during their 'free time', was a recurring theme in the interviews. Maintaining an active online presence, particularly on Instagram, and managing both private and professional communication through a single WhatsApp account were cited as especially draining. Another frequently mentioned example was being approached at forró parties, i.e. outside of official work hours, by people seeking, for instance, to learn dance steps.

"This is a crazy thing [facepalm], and it's like, Instagram, there's a video every minute, there's always some post about a festival or someone asking for something, you have to do a promo for this or that, send the lessons over there. There's always something happening, all related to forró, day in, day out, right? If you stop to think about it, there really is quite a lot, it's many hours overall, isn't it? All forró-related [...] it's working out, yeah, but it's just really exhausting, really exhausting." (I7)

4.2.1.3. Time-Management Problems

Participants reported difficulties in managing their time between professional duties, personal relationships, and everyday responsibilities. They experience a lack of time, largely because their lives are oriented around their profession, a result of their passion for it. Nonetheless, they expressed a desire to be able to spend more quality

time with family, partner, friends, or even with themselves. This highlights the conflict between their professional and personal life.

Furthermore, it is a profession that is night- and weekend-oriented, which further complicates everyday life. Firstly, one important issue raised was the challenge of caring for children, as school and childcare schedules typically do not align with their working hours. Similarly, meeting friends or having a partner who follow a standard 9-to-5 schedule was reported as a complicated. It was noted in particular, that relationships function best either when the partner shares the same profession, has a flexible work schedule, or works in home-office.

Furthermore, participants also mentioned the challenge of pursuing other hobbies, as these activities often take place during the same hours as forró classes and events. Finally, several interviewees expressed difficulties in establishing healthy eating habits, particularly in accommodating dinner. Eating right before classes is unfavourable, however, having dinner afterward means very late at night.

4.2.1.4. Blurred Boundaries between Private and Professional Life

There are various ways in which the boundaries between the forró teachers' private and professional lives are blurred. One major factor is the lack of a fixed working schedule or routine. Many participants described struggling to draw clear lines around tasks and thought processes related to their profession, which frequently spill into what should be personal time. The fact that forró is their passion fuels this constant involvement, but it also makes it harder for them to recognise when they need personal space, and even harder to step back when they do (see 4.1.1 Forró as a Key Component of Life). All interviewees had considerable difficulty in answering when asked to describe a typical working week as a forró teacher. Initial responses often included laughter or remarks such as, "*that's a complex question*" (I2, I3, I4 & I8). Their professional lives are different from week to week and characterised by irregular schedules. Moreover, the work is largely unstructured, with no given routine, making organising a crucial resource (for more details, see 4.3 Coping Strategies). Respondents also cited seasonal fluctuations and the general uncertainty about how many students will join their classes. Many aspects of their work are unpredictable and may arise on short notice, among others, requests for private lessons, administrative tasks, or meetings.

Another contributing factor is that all participants use their private homes for work purposes, among others, private classes, administrative tasks, class preparation, and personal dance practice. As a result, the physical and temporal distinction between work and personal life becomes further dissolved. Moreover, many mentioned that their passion to travel is often channelled through work opportunities, such as teaching at festivals abroad, which further reinforces this overlap.

An equally important aspect is that the teachers' personal lives seem to be built into their professional life. Many of their friendships have grown out of the forró community, and they tend to form personal bonds with their students. As one interviewee explained:

"I know very well how to be professional in my field, but at the same time I build bonds with my students. I rarely have a student who doesn't end up becoming a friend, you know? Even if it's a bit distant, there's always some kind of relationship." (I7)

Participants also spoke about the difficulty of stepping out of their professional role, particularly in settings like forró parties. Even when attending events to enjoy themselves and meet friends, they continue to be perceived and treated as forró teachers. In particular, they are continuously observed and lack private space, filmed without consent while dancing, and approached with teaching-related questions. Also, when dancing with students, the students might be concerned about being evaluated or judged, even in informal settings. The participants voiced this clearly in the interviews:

"Sometimes I like going to places where I'm not known, because there I'm not a teacher. I'm just another person dancing forró." (I6)

"At the dance parties, I really wish I could separate things, I would really, really like to be there without people looking at me as a teacher all the time, you know? And it's not about whether I'm doing something or not, it's just about being there, you know? Sitting down, dancing, and then someone pulls out a phone with the flash on and starts filming. You know? I miss that, just enjoying the dance as a forrozeiro, as someone who's part of the scene. I miss having that separation." (I7)

Some interviewees also articulated that the public tends to perceive them as always 'working', expecting them to be available (socially and for dancing) and enjoying. What they desire instead is the opportunity to step outside their teacher role and simply enjoy forró events as regular participants:

"People say, 'Oh, how do you do that?' - 'Well, either you take a private lesson, or you don't.' I am here to dance. I am here to enjoy ourselves. Sure, I might give a tip here and there. But also, I try not to mix things [...] because as a public figure, people are always going to see you as if you were working [...] they'll always be watching you in that same way. And that can be a bit complicated, too. Because I have my own lifestyle. I have my own life. If I'm at a forró event, I'm there to dance [...] not as a teacher, but to enjoy the party. To dance. To interact. To chat with friends. Because it's complicated. It really is. I live forró. But people will always act as if I'm working." (I3)

4.2.2. Financial Challenges

It is not about the money, but they need money. As clearly observed in the interviews, money is not the motivating or driving factor in their profession. However, as one respondent indicated, *"we are living in the real world and have to pay our bills"* (I5). Participants also articulated that they (want to) work a lot; it is, after all, their passion. Nevertheless, many continue to face financial struggles, with some expressing the sentiment of working a lot for very little.

"It's really complicated. Things are always tight." (I1)

"If I could change something about my working conditions, it would be the financial recognition. It might sound obvious, of course everyone wants to be better paid, but the truth is, it's a really limited landscape. We have to work very hard just to have a decent life. And I do want to keep working hard, but I also want a standard of living that matches my dreams, you know?" (I4)

At the same time, the respondents seem to adopt creative strategies to reduce their living expenses, or as one interviewee stated, *"you have to live with less, to be more"* (I1). For instance, they collaborate with friends and exchange services, such as, offering private classes in return for photo shoots. In addition, when their forró-related work does not generate sufficient earnings, they take on other jobs to supplement their income. Some even work two jobs in parallel and articulated in the interviews how demanding and difficult this can be. Furthermore, all respondents mentioned that they try to use a variety of income possibilities both within and outside the forró world to diversify their income streams and, thereby, gain more financial security.

"My real challenges have been [...] having to sometimes give up doing what I love and do another kind of job, one that's respected like any other. But I always try to work with what I want, with what I love, which is my art. Unfortunately, though, that's not always possible, right?" (I3)

Closely linked to the irregularity of work, as discussed above, their income is also unstable. Just like class attendance, income is unpredictable and subject to fluctuations. Influencing factors include the time of year, teaching at festivals, and even the weather. It was also mentioned that the forró community is very small in overall terms, which makes it difficult to attract enough students consistently throughout the year, and thus contributes to the financial volatility of the profession.

All of the interviewees are self-employed workers, which comes with further disadvantages: they do not receive a 13th and 14th salary, their income is neither fixed nor guaranteed, and retirement provisions depend on personal savings and investments. In cases where they are unable to work, they receive no income (this aspect is further discussed in 4.2.3 Health: Body as a Working Tool). These conditions present not only logistical and financial challenges but also emotional distress in both their private and professional lives. According to the participants, there is little protection for the self-employed in Portugal.

"[Planning for retirement] depends on me, doesn't it? I'm the one who needs to put aside the amount I think is necessary, there's no other form of investment." (I5)

Several participants voiced that being relieved of financial concerns and avoiding additional non-forró work would enable them to channel more energy into creativity, greater presence, and improvements in the forró world. This, in turn, would result in a more fulfilling and enjoyable professional experience. Furthermore, some interviewees dream of a physical dance and community space of their own, available for use throughout the day and at an affordable cost. This underscores the difficulty of managing substantial fixed costs in context where income is

volatile future earnings are uncertain. To conclude, it is difficult and demanding to make a living solely as an (autonomous) dance teacher:

“Financially, it's a challenge to be an artist, and an even greater challenge to be a self-employed artist, but here we are on the journey.” (I4)

4.2.3. Health: Body as a Working Tool

On the positive side of health, participants mentioned that at certain times in their lives, they have used forró dancing to relieve stress. Secondly, it became clear from the conversations that the interviewed forró teachers generally have a lot of energy, a positive mindset, and an overall good mental health, as they are working with their passion; they love working with forró. Finally, it was positively highlighted that their work is physically active, in contrast to a sedentary office job.

“Forró has brought me a lot of mental health benefits but has also left some physical marks [laughter].” (I4)

On the other hand, the respondents also emphasised some negative aspects. Working as a forró teacher is a profession largely tied to nightlife, which makes it difficult to maintain a ‘normal’ routine and get sufficient sleep. This is accentuated when teaching at festivals, where lack of sleep and rest is inevitable, and unhealthy food is often the norm. Additionally, dancing many hours (counting workshops, private lessons, and attending parties) places significant physical demands on the body.

“Even though nowadays I try to sleep earlier and so on, it's a challenge, because I spent many sleepless nights, so my sleep pattern is completely messed up — I sleep very little, really very little.” (I4)

“Most times we can't eat healthily because festivals want fast options. So it's pizza, pasta, you know, very quick things to eat. Fast food.” (I2)

Furthermore, for dance teachers, their body is their working tool. The line between private and professional life is blurred, as they must care for their body and keep it functional for their work. Ageing is an additional key aspect factor, bringing changes to the body and influencing what kind of work remains physically possible. Most participants also cited that they continue working despite bodily discomfort, whether being ill, injured, or under stress. In this context, being self-employed implies that downtime means no income. One interviewee put it poignantly:

“It's ultimately a high-risk profession [...] in terms of my physical health, because we need the body to work, and therefore any kind of injury can be fatal, right? And this has already happened to me several times, and I couldn't stop, because as a freelance profession, if I stop, I don't earn — so I keep working even with various types of injuries” (I5)

4.2.4. Social Dimensions: Partner Dancing is not just about Dancing

In general, dance teachers need to build a relationship with their students, making soft skills crucial to their work. Furthermore, there was mention that some students require extra attention or support, which demands the teacher to be socially available. The following quotes provide insights into important social aspects involved in working as a forró teacher:

“Often I go to the dance party, and people stop me there and say, ‘Can you teach me a step? Teach my friend over there to dance quickly, teacher, because he’s eager to learn forró,’ but I don’t go up to an architect and say, ‘Teach me how to design a house right now’... I don’t approach someone in technology and say, ‘Teach me how to make a website’ [...] but, even though that challenge is already big enough, for me the biggest challenge in forró is dealing with people who don’t truly understand forró as a culture that deserves respect, who don’t quite see that the bodies, although close together, united, deserve respect [...] it’s an environment, unfortunately, still full of harassment, isn’t it? We have people at the forefront of anti-harassment efforts who fight vehemently to reduce it, and I hope that soon we’ll be close to breaking that pattern. I know it’s difficult, but I know we are moving towards a dance that is healthier, welcoming, and respectful for everyone, but my biggest challenge in forró, unfortunately, is harassment.” (I4, female)

“There are lots of people who go to classes not only because they want to learn, or not mainly to learn, but because they want to socialise or need attention or something else [...] sometimes it triggers a bit of a phobia in me towards people, more or less like that, because the students aren’t to blame but they can’t always see that the teacher is human too. Sometimes we just want to go to the party like an ordinary person. Well, that’s it, I suppose it ends up being a burden. There are times when I feel it more heavily, and others when I cope with it quite well.” (I5)

Moreover, several participants have experienced different kinds of discrimination, not only as dance teachers but also on the dance floor. These included, gender-based discrimination (mainly against women), as well as discrimination based on age, ethnicity (against Brazilians living in Portugal, and Portuguese teachers for not being Brazilian), and skin colour. A recurring theme in all these aspects was the pressure of ‘having to prove oneself’; whether as a woman, a Brazilian living in Portugal, a Portuguese forró teacher, a person of colour, or someone of advanced age. While the participants described these experiences as challenging, it was also voiced that it motivates them to be active and to represent and give voice to marginalised groups. This connects back to ‘changing the world through forró’ and ‘fighting for women empowerment’ (for more details, see 4.1.2 Purposeful Work and Feeling Accomplished). The following quotes illustrate how discrimination and exclusion manifest in different ways within the forró community:

“When you go to the dance, you see an elderly gentleman or lady sitting there, and nobody asks them to dance, you know?” (I4, discrimination based on age)

"I think that sometimes, indeed, there is a perception that only a Brazilian can give good forró lessons." (I6)

"In Europe, because I am Brazilian, there is prejudice [...] this kind of prejudice shouldn't exist as long as each person is judged individually. It doesn't matter their colour, size, shape, or where they came from." (I1)

One of the most frequently mentioned issues was the lack of recognition and the discrimination faced by women. Amongst others, women are not respected when dancing in the leader role, they are subjected to inappropriate sexual approaches on the dance floor, and they are neither respected nor paid attention to in business matters such as contract negotiations. The participants spoke openly about these challenges:

"It happens regularly when I'm dancing with another woman and a man comes over and says, 'Oh, someone's missing here, two women together won't work' [...] so there are many barriers that still need to be overcome." (I4)

"I see many of my female colleagues talking about this lack of recognition that women sometimes face when trying to stand out as teachers, to get the same conditions and the like [...] I've spoken with friends who, for example, were teaching alongside someone and the person hiring would only talk to the man, you know? They wouldn't treat her properly, the remuneration was paid to him in the end, everything was dealt with through him, as if she was nothing, you know?" (I7)

Nevertheless, many also pointed out that the forró community has evolved in recent years. There is now a growing group actively engaged in the '*luta antirracista e antissexista*' (fight against racism and sexism, I4). In fact, two female interviewees articulated that they had never personally felt disadvantaged as women within the forró scene, which indicates improvements, especially in relation to gender and gender roles in partner dancing.

4.3. Coping Strategies

The most important strategy for coping with the challenges described above, as articulated in the interviews, is organising. According to the participants, it is an essential skill to manage the many and diverse tasks involved in their profession and to deal with the irregular nature of their work. Without effective organisation, it is easy to feel overwhelmed, lose track of tasks, or experience a poor work-life balance. Put differently, without good organisational skills, it would be extremely difficult to make a living through forró; especially given the increased responsibility and planning required of self-employed individuals.

"This is my daily struggle, trying to find a perfect system to get a bit organised. Because there are so many very different tasks, each with its own level of energy and time you have to put in. And there's just so much to do." (I2)

Another coping strategy frequently mentioned in the interviews is reducing workload. That is to say, choosing to accept fewer invitations to teach at festivals or abroad, or they consciously take days off to rest. One respondent, for example, shared:

“That [resting Mondays] is something I’m trying to do this year to recover more quickly, because it takes me three days to recover from a festival and then you have to go again, and you end up feeling like a zombie.” (I7)

Furthermore, participants reported that, over time and with experience, their workload and stress tended to decrease, while feelings of calm and security increased. At a certain point, they had already established the core structure and content of their classes and developed synchrony with their teaching partners. In addition, aligning their work with their personal values and maintaining a positive attitude helps them experience their work as more enjoyable and less burdensome. This was well expressed by one interviewee:

“Today, I’m able to work on projects that are 100% aligned with what makes sense to me, which helps things feel a little lighter.” (I4)

On a different note, participants also articulated the need for some kind of compensation or balance to increase their well-being and to sustain their passion and enthusiasm within the work context. Among the strategies they mentioned were mediation, mindfulness, nature escapes, digital detox, exercising, and reading. Other respondents highlighted the importance of variety, specifically, not dedicating themselves 100% to a single job. This variety could also be achieved within the forró world itself, for instance, by organising events, playing in bands, working as DJs, or engaging in other forró-related activities.

“My life is completely centred around spirituality. That’s what keeps me going. If it weren’t for the spiritual side, I wouldn’t have managed to keep going in this environment until now.” (I1)

“During the pandemic, I was giving many online lessons [...] then, due to the physical exhaustion, that’s when the alarm bell went off, like, ‘Hold on, take it easy, or you’ll burn out on this.’” (I7)

4.4. Future of Work

Lastly, it became evident throughout the interviews that the grand majority of participants cannot imagine working in a different profession; their work is passion-driven. However, some expressed the possibility of changing how they work with forró in the future. This might include focusing more on online courses, offering consultancy for teachers and communities, developing their own brand, and reducing teaching to more occasional events.

Many participants clearly voiced that the current intensity of work is not sustainable in the long run. Ageing and physical health were often mentioned as influential, and potentially limiting, factors. At the same time, the future

remains uncertain for many, largely due to the irregular nature of the work, unpredictable conditions, and the difficulty of planning in such a dynamic field. In the words of the participants:

"I will never stop... I will always be a dance teacher, a dancer [...] so changing careers isn't an option, but I can change the stream within the same river. I will NEVER stop." (I1)

"Me? Change careers? Never! Never... I'll be doing this for the rest of my life." (I3)

"I definitely want to teach for a long time, but in the end, it's up to my body [laughs], isn't it?" (I4)

"I want to keep going for as long as I can. I don't necessarily think age has to be a limiting factor. It'll likely become more demanding, yes." (I5)

5. Discussion

The central finding of this research project concerning the working and living conditions of forró teachers in Portugal is the tension they experience between various key aspects of their professional lives. On the one hand, they derive enjoyment, personal fulfilment, and satisfaction from working with their passion and giving something (empowering) to their students; on the other, they face manifold challenges embedded in the work-life nexus. The findings of this study resonate with Kong (2011) and Naclerio (2023), highlighting that although cultural work provides freedom, independence and creative space, it is also marked by financial insecurity, lack of social protection, exhaustion, discrimination, and the broader precarity associated with freelance work. This study is consistent with previous findings pointing out that passion-driven workers often accept, or even normalise, precarious conditions precisely because they love what they do (Hesmondhalgh & Baker, 2011; Van Assche, 2018). In other words, the feelings of accomplishment, purpose, and personal fulfilment function as a key source of motivation. Moreover, reflecting broader trends observed in the literature, participants in this study regard working with forró not merely as a job, but as a lifestyle (Naclerio, 2023; Van Assche, 2018) and, in many cases, a 'calling' (Desmond, 2019; Lorey, 2006; Naclerio, 2023).

The following discussion draws on the concept of *precarity* to further explore the study's findings. The results suggest that forró teachers represent a compelling example of precarity within the creative sector, reinforcing many of the characteristics of precarious work as presented in the extant literature (EDN, 2023; Ellmeier, 2003; Vallejos, 2019; Van Assche, 2018). In particular, the outcomes of this research are in line with Lorey's (2006) position that precarious working and living conditions are interrelated. Among the most relevant features of the precariat in this context are lack of work-life balance, financial challenges, physical demands, and uncertainties; the latter encompass fluctuating work opportunities, unpredictable schedules, unclear career trajectories, and limited access to social security. As discussed earlier, this study adopts Van Assche's (2018) conceptualisation of precariousness as multidimensional, specifically encompassing socio-economic, mental, and physical forms of precarity. This concept offers an analytical lens through which the experiences of forró teachers in Portugal can be interpreted.

Firstly, consistent with the literature, this study reveals *socio-economic precarity*, taking the form of low wages, financial pressures, unstable income, minimal or absent social protection, and the generally undervalued status of creative work (Blades, 2019; Ellmeier, 2003; Shorter et al., 2018; Van Assche, 2018). Nonetheless, drawing on Robinson (2017) and Van Assche (2018), while performance dancers are often compelled to take on second jobs, several forró teachers in Portugal, despite facing significant difficulties, manage to sustain themselves financially without seeking employment outside of forró. Moreover, supporting the findings of Shorter et al. (2018), respondents revealed that not all professional activities are financially compensated, for instance, travel for teaching abroad or attending professional meetings is often unpaid. Furthermore, in accordance with Van Assche (2018), many respondents expressed concerns about their financial future, highlighting the inherent instability and unpredictability of their profession, which is a common feature of self-employment.

Moreover, consistent with Van Assche's (2018) observations, *forró* teachers are also confronted with *physical precarity*, as their bodies are their primary work instruments. Many reported continuing to work despite injuries or illness, largely due to fears of income loss or the absence of suitable replacements. In other words, their professional livelihood is directly dependent on their body health. Along similar lines, as Hesmondhalgh and Baker (2011) suggest, sustaining a career as a dance teacher throughout a lifetime is a challenging endeavour. Moreover, respondents in this study voiced the challenges posed by *forró* being a predominantly night-time profession, with lack of sleep being a common issue. Nevertheless, while my interviews addressed the experiences of dance teachers, literature suggests that these conditions are even more aggravated for performance dancers, whose work is more strenuous on the body and demands higher levels of fitness. For instance, Van Assche (2018) notes that artists engaging exclusively in performance dancing are especially prone to early retirement, in contrast to those focusing on teaching roles.

Thirdly, *mental precarity* is another significant aspect in the lives of dance teachers. The results of this study confirm the high degree of uncertainty associated with freelance work, as noted by Hesmondhalgh and Baker (2010) and Van Assche (2018). In accordance with Van Assche's (2018) analysis, respondents reported investing significant time, effort, and often personal financial resources into their work, without having any guarantee that their project will succeed or obtain financial return. Unlike performance dancers, who are typically dependent on public or institutional funding (Van Assche, 2018), *forró* teachers earn their income through student participation. Unlike the uncertainty of when and if funding will be provided, the latter creates a different kind of instability: teachers must rely on maintaining a steady number of students, yet class attendance is often unpredictable. This unpredictability regarding participation contributes to anxiety about the long-term sustainability of their projects. This concern was clearly expressed during interviews, where participants described income instability and the necessity of planning around seasonal fluctuations, for instance, anticipating periods with fewer income opportunities. Such uncertainties are even more accentuated for parents, who need to secure a stable monthly income in order to provide for their children. Moreover, several respondents revealed experiencing a constant feeling of being 'on stand-by', which they associated with elevated stress levels and ongoing nervousness (as discussed in 4.2.1.2 Constant Availability). Similarly, a consistent theme across the interviews was the perception of persistently being overworked. Their time is heavily consumed by work obligations, leaving little room for truly personal activities. This intense workload often led to expressions of exhaustion and a desire for improved work-life balance. Furthermore, an aspect not addressed in the literature but highlighted in the interviews is the experience of discrimination in the professional context. These included, gender-based discrimination (mainly against women), as well as discrimination based on age, skin colour, and ethnicity (against Brazilians living in Portugal, and Portuguese teachers for not being Brazilian), all of which participants described as provoking stress and emotional burden. In addition, respondents reported instances of disrespectful behaviour directed at them for being artists, for instance, in the form of unfair contract proposals. While the participants framed such experiences of discrimination as challenging, the findings suggest that they simultaneously serve as a catalyst for engagement and advocacy, encouraging teachers to represent and give voice to marginalised groups.

Furthermore, the findings indicate the presence of *self-precarisation* among forró teachers, as brought forward by Lorey (2006). It became clear during the interviews that they purposefully choose to work with their passion, willingly accepting lower material rewards in exchange for immaterial benefits such as a sense of fulfilment, temporal autonomy, and opportunities for self-realisation, provided they can meet their basic needs (Lorey, 2006; Van Assche, 2017). Likewise, following Hesmondhalgh and Baker (2010), the idea that ‘pleasure in work’ is closely linked to processes of self-exploitation was also reflected in the responses in this study. However, it should not be overlooked that this condition is rooted in broader structural issues, namely, the undervaluation of dance professions and the lack of institutional or governmental support. As such, this situation cannot be fully attributed to result from a genuinely free choice (Baybutt, 2023; Lorey, 2006). This dynamic is further supported by the study’s findings that most of the teachers interviewed began working with forró as a side job before transitioning fully, although they wished they could have pursued their passion from the beginning.

Consistent with Hesmondhalgh and Baker (2010) and Blades (2019), many cultural workers tend to hold multiple jobs and/or work on several projects simultaneously. For the participants in this study, this included teaching on festivals, offering different dance class formats, teaching online, undertaking research, engaging in personal practice, developing other forró-related business ideas, and, in some cases, taking on work unrelated to forró. The participants’ narratives also support findings in the literature which highlight that self-employed cultural workers are often confronted with a hustle of multi-faceted activities. In this context, self-efficacy becomes a crucial tool for maintaining intrinsic motivation in this challenging setting (Goodwin, 2019). The notion of the “permanent colonization of the artistic by the non-artistic”, as described by Van Assche (2018, p. 335), was strongly reflected in the participants’ experiences. In other words, echoing Blades (2019), respondents underscored the multitude of organisational, preparatory, and administrative responsibilities that accompany their creative work. Another point raised by several participants, corresponding to Van Assche (2017), is that touring or teaching workshops abroad is often difficult to reconcile with maintaining a stable routine or family life.

Moreover, forró teachers tend to integrate their passion, work, and private life into a single lifestyle. They live for their passion, in the sense that their lives are built around their passion-driven work. As noted in the literature, cultural workers often deliberately choose to pursue a passion-driven career path (Baybutt, 2023; Desmond, 2019; Hesmondhalgh & Baker, 2011; Naclerio, 2023). In line with Hesmondhalgh and Baker (2011), participants in this study voiced that their identities are largely defined through their work. Along similar lines, not only do they sell their labour, but also the idea and image projected through their professional identity. Furthermore, following Desmond (2019), the findings suggest that they exhibit a level of emotional involvement that goes beyond simply viewing their work as a job. As highlighted by Hesmondhalgh and Baker (2011), many forró teachers experience their work as a way of realising personal potential, nurturing their talents, and enhancing self-esteem, factors that contribute to a sense of purpose and meaning in life. In addition, in accordance with Shorter et al. (2018), several interviewees described their connection to forró as beneficial to their mental health. Building on this, the findings further extend this discussion by emphasising the altruistic dimension of the work of forró teachers interviewed in this study. For them, work is not merely a profession but a means to enact

meaningful change, in their own words, to “change the world through forró.” Some even framed forró as a powerful ‘tool’ or ‘weapon’ for a transformative impact, enabling students to overcome shyness, build self-confidence, and grow not only as individuals but also as active members of the community.

As a result of the aforementioned, forró teachers often experience a lack of clear separation between their personal and professional lives, a phenomenon also reflected in the literature (Desmond, 2019; Lorey, 2006; Naclerio, 2023; Van Assche, 2018). In particular, they face irregular schedules, undefined working hours, and the expectation of being constantly available. As Van Assche (2018) acknowledges, creative work is deeply intertwined with everyday life, a point reinforced by participants who reported that they are continuously thinking about forró-related matters. In accordance with Ellmeier (2003), many described working from anywhere at any time, whether by being reachable online or using their home as a workspace. Furthermore, as Van Assche (2018) observes, there is a personal-professional confusion, something confirmed by the participants, many of whom stated that their social connections are within the forró community, meaning that their professional and personal spheres are largely one and the same.

The Literature also addresses the survival tactics adopted by cultural workers to continue working in their field despite the ongoing (economic) challenges. To give an example, several participants in this study described exchanging services with friends or colleagues as a way to manage limited financial resources, what Van Assche (2018) refers to as a creative coping strategy in response to persistent precarity. In addition, most forró teachers diversify their income streams, for instance by combining teaching with other forró-related projects or, when necessary, supplementing their earnings through work outside the creative sector. This practice aligns with findings by Naclerio (2023) and Hesmondhalgh and Baker (2010), who observe that such diversification is common among cultural workers as a means of sustaining both their livelihoods and their creative autonomy.

6. Conclusion & Outlook

Overall, when compared with the broader literature on performing artists (e.g. Van Assche, 2018), the working and living conditions of forró teachers in Portugal, as reflected in this study, appear to be less severe than those typically experienced by (contemporary) performance dancers. This difference may be attributed to two main factors. First, teaching, which relies on students attending regularly, offers a more predictable and secure income, in contrast to the heightened uncertainties of performance work, which depends on ticket sales or public funding. Second, performance dance is often more time-consuming, physically demanding, and requiring strong professional commitment, thus making it a more precarious occupation overall.

Nevertheless, most findings resonate with previous research, illustrating that forró teachers willingly accept countless challenges, including financial insecurity, irregular schedules, physical strain, and lack of work-life balance, in order to continue working with their passion. Despite the demanding nature of their professional path, they remain committed, driven by a sense of purpose, self-realisation, emotional fulfilment, and bringing about a positive impact on others. As Lorey (2006) states, “without passion and self-realisation fantasies, there

would likely be insufficient willingness to endure the prevalent precarious working and living conditions.” For them, being a forró teacher is not just a hobby or a job; it is their way of life.

While work-life imbalances and financial challenges were anticipated, the findings revealed the remarkable strength of the participants’ intrinsic motivation, which strongly influences their professional trajectories. Many participants described how their professional lives are shaped by their personal life experiences and vice versa, highlighting the deep integration of passion and work.

At the same time, while some participants in this study manage to make a modest living from forró alone, this often involves trade-offs and a lack of long-term financial security. In this sense, making a living solely from work in the creative sector, such as teaching forró, may be viable in the short to medium term, but appears precarious as a lifelong career, especially when considering the financial future, family planning, and physical health.

Ultimately, the current conditions suggest that without structural support, such as stronger validation of dance as a profession, social protections, and governmental support, being a forró teacher will continue to be accompanied by persistent difficulties and is unlikely to receive the recognition or compensation that reflects the value dance and the creative industries contribute to mental health and broader societal well-being. Precarity in the cultural sector has been well-documented for years, what is needed now is meaningful change to improve the working and living conditions of those who dedicate their lives to these undervalued yet essential professions.

To conclude, this study offers a context-bound conceptual orientation delineating the working and living conditions of forró teachers in Portugal, and hopefully provides a fruitful basis for further investigation and theoretical development within dance professions and the wider creative industries. Open questions remain regarding the feasibility of making a sustainable living through passion-driven work, the structural changes needed to improve the lived experiences of these professionals, and how such changes might be enacted, as well as the role of digital presence in shaping professional opportunities and income stability. Future research could explore these questions using a mixed-methods approach. Quantitative analysis could examine income levels, background characteristics, and job satisfaction, while qualitative research could provide insights into concrete strategies for improving working conditions and the requirements for making a sustainable living through passion-driven work. Finally, research should aim at informing policy and improving the conditions for those dedicated to creative professions.

7. References

Baltà Portolés, J. (2021). *Dance and Well-being. Review of evidence and policy perspectives.*

EDN - European Dance Development Network.

https://www.ednetwork.eu/uploads/documents/59/EDN_Dance%20%26%20Well-being%20Full%20Publication.pdf

Baybutt, A. (2023). *EQUITY IN WORKING CONDITIONS IN DANCE.*

Blades, H. (2019). Projects, Precarity, and the Ontology of Dance Works. *Dance Research Journal*, 51(1), 66–78. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0149767719000056>

Bryant, A. (2017). *Grounded Theory and Grounded Theorizing: Pragmatism in Research Practice* (Illustrated edition). Oxford University Press.

Bryant, A., & Charmaz, K. (2007). *The SAGE Handbook of Grounded Theory*. SAGE Publications Ltd. <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781848607941>

Charmaz, K. (2014). *Constructing Grounded Theory* (Second edition). SAGE Publications Ltd.

Charmaz, K., & Bryant, A. (2007). Introduction. Grounded Theory Research: Methods and Practices. In *The Sage Handbook of Grounded Theory*. (pp. 1–28). Sage.

Desmond, J. C. (2019). Zones of Production in Possible Worlds: Dance's Precarious Placement, an Afterword. *Dance Research Journal*, 51(1), 96–101. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S014976771900007X>

Dias, I., & Dupan, S. (2017). *O que é o Forró. Um pequeno apanhado da história do forró.* Latus.

EDN - European Dance Development Network. (2023). *Working conditions.* <https://www.ednetwork.eu/page/themes/professionals/working-conditions>

Ellmeier, A. (2003). Cultural entrepreneurialism: On the changing relationship between the arts, culture and employment. *International Journal of Cultural Policy*, 9(1), 3–16. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1028663032000069158a>

- Flick, U. (2014). *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Data Analysis*. SAGE Publications Ltd.
<https://doi.org/10.4135/9781446282243>
- Froschauer, U., & Lueger, M. (2020). *Das qualitative Interview: Zur Praxis interpretativer Analyse sozialer Systeme* (2., vollständig überarbeitete und erweiterte Auflage 2020). Facultas. <https://doi.org/10.36198/9783838552804>
- Goodwin, K. (2019). Developing self-efficacy and career optimism through participation in communities of practice within Australian creative industries. *Australian Journal of Career Development*, 28(2), 122–131. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1038416219849644>
- Hesmondhalgh, D., & Baker, S. (2010). ‘A very complicated version of freedom’: Conditions and experiences of creative labour in three cultural industries. *Poetics*, 38(1), 4–20.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.poetic.2009.10.001>
- Hesmondhalgh, D., & Baker, S. (2011). Creative Labour: Media Work in Three Cultural Industries. In *Creative Labour: Media Work in Three Cultural Industries* (p. 265).
<https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203855881>
- Kong, L. (2011). From precarious labor to precarious economy? Planning for precarity in Singapore’s creative economy. *City, Culture and Society*, 2(2), 55–64.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ccs.2011.05.002>
- Lorey, I. (2006). *Governmentality and Self-Precarization*. Transversal Texts. Retrieved June 25, 2025, from <https://transversal.at/transversal/1106/lorey/en>
- Naclerio, E. (2023). Playing among passion and insecurity. A qualitative study of work in the Italian performing arts. *Rassegna Italiana Di Sociologia*.
<https://doi.org/10.1423/107147>

- Rizzuto, R. (2021, November 4). What Does It Take to Create a Healthy Working Environment for Dancers? *Dance Magazine*. <https://dancemagazine.com/healthy-work-environment/>
- Robinson, A. (2017, December 22). Op-Ed: Why Freelance Dancing is Undervalued & Underfunded. *Dance Magazine*. <https://dancemagazine.com/freelance-dancers-undervalued-underfunded/>
- Saldaña, J. (2015). *The Coding Manual for Qualitative Researchers* (3rd edition). SAGE Publications Ltd.
- Scheibelhofer, E. (2008). Combining Narration-Based Interviews with Topical Interviews: Methodological Reflections on Research Practices. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, 11(5), 403–416. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13645570701401370>
- Shorter, G. W., O'Neill, S., & McElherron, L. (2018). *Changing Arts and Minds: A survey of health and wellbeing in the creative sector: summary report*. Inspire.
- Standing, G. (2011). *The Precariat: The New Dangerous Class*. Bloomsbury USA.
- Standing, G. (2018). The Precariat: Today's Transformative Class? *Development*, 61(1–4), 115–121. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41301-018-0182-5>
- Thornberg, R., Halldin, K., Bolmsjö, N., & Petersson, A. (2011). Victimising of school bullying: A grounded theory. *Research Papers in Education*, 2011. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02671522.2011.641999>
- Urquhart, C. (2022). *Grounded Theory for Qualitative Research: A Practical Guide* (Second edition). SAGE Publications Ltd.

- Vallejos, J. I. (2019). Subverting Precariousness: Work, History, and Aesthetics in Contemporary Dance in Buenos Aires. *Dance Research Journal*, 51(1), 32–46.
<https://doi.org/10.1017/S0149767719000032>
- Van Assche, A. (2017). The future of dance and/as work: Performing precarity. *Research in Dance Education*, 18(3), 237–251. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14647893.2017.1387526>
- Van Assche, A. (2018). *Dancing precarity: A transdisciplinary study of the working and living conditions in the contemporary dance scenes of Brussels and Berlin* [Dissertation, Ghent University]. <http://hdl.handle.net/1854/LU-8583256>

8. Appendices

8.1. Appendix A: Overview of Interviews

Interview nb	Date
Interview 1	12.01.2025
Interview 2	13.01.2025
Interview 3	12.02.2025
Interview 4	13.02.2025
Interview 5	09.03.2025
Interview 6	03.04.2025
Interview 7	08.04.2025
Interview 8	14.04.2025

8.2. Appendix B: Final Interview Guide (in Portuguese)

1. Personal Journey and Motivation

1.1. Para começar, podes partilhar um pouco sobre o teu percurso no forró e como é que te tornaste professor(a) de dança?

1.2. O teu trabalho como professor(a) de forró mudou ao longo do tempo? Se sim, de que forma?

2. Activities, Working Conditions, Job Satisfaction

2.1. Poderias descrever uma semana típica na tua vida como professor(a) de forró?

- Como professora quais são as tuas principais atividades no teu trabalho além de ensinar ou dançar?

2.2. No teu trabalho, qual é a importância da presença online, como nas redes sociais?

2.3. O que achas mais gratificante ou recompensador em ser professor(a) de forró?

2.4. Quais são os maiores desafios (ou obstáculos) que enfrentas no teu trabalho como professora?

2.5. Acreditas que fatores como o género ou outras características tem influenciado as tuas oportunidades ou desafios como professor(a) de forró?

- Isso pode incluir...género, etnia, cor de pele, questões legais/burocráticas, orientação sexual, ... só para mencionar algumas.

3. Income Reality and Career Sustainability

3.1. Como está a tua situação financeira? Como cobres as tuas despesas de vida?

- É suficiente?
- Tens trabalhos adicionais para complementar a tua renda?

3.2. Sentes que às vezes aceitas ou aceitaste um pagamento baixo ou que te sobrecarregas para sustentar a tua carreira?

3.3. Como encaras o trabalho não remunerado?

-> Inclui tudo o que fazes como prof fora das atividades pagas

3.4. Já pensaste em como pode ser o teu futuro financeiro, incluindo planear para a reforma?

4. Work-Life Balance, Well-Being, Survival Tactics

4.1. Como concilias o teu trabalho como professor(a) de forró com a tua vida pessoal? -> E.g.

- Como é que o ensino de forró se alinha com os teus objetivos e responsabilidades de vida mais gerais? ... p.ex. família, ou outro trabalho
- Práticas e danças para ti próprio(a)?

4.2. Qual achas a importância do trabalho na formação da tua identidade?

- Existem momentos em que gostarias de separar a tua identidade como professor(a) de dança da tua vida pessoal?

4.3. Em relação à tua saúde, sentes-te saudável?

- Não é bastante exigente com tantas horas de dança, noites em claro e viagens?
- Já sentiste algum desgaste físico ou lesões? Como lidas com isso?
- E a tua saúde mental?

5. Aspirations and Future Outlook

5.1. Imaginas-te a trabalhar como professor(a) de forró a longo prazo? Porquê sim ou porquê não?

- Já alguma vez consideraste mudar de carreira? Se sim, o que te levou a considerar essa mudança?

7.2. Se pudesses mudar uma coisa nas tuas condições de trabalho, o que mudarias?

7.3. Num mundo ideal, se pudesses sonhar, qual seria o teu maior desejo na vida?

8. Closing

8.1. Há mais alguma coisa que gostarias de acrescentar que não falámos ainda?

9. Breve Questionário

Muito obrigada pela conversa e pelos teus insights valiosos!

8.3. Appendix C: Consent Form (in Portuguese)

Declaração de Consentimento: Gravação e Tratamento de Dados da Entrevista

TEMA DO PROJETO: Condições de trabalho e de vida de professores(as) de forró em Portugal

UNIVERSIDADE: Universidade de Negócios Viena

AUTORA: Mira Kraus

Concordo em participar na entrevista no âmbito do projeto de investigação acima referido. Foi-me comunicado o objetivo do projeto.

Aceito que a entrevista seja gravada e posteriormente transcrita. Os ficheiros de áudio serão armazenados durante a fase de análise e eliminados no final do projeto, o mais tardar até 31/05/2025. A análise científica do texto da entrevista será realizada pela autora e estará sujeita às normas legais de proteção de dados da WU. A transcrição da entrevista será utilizada exclusivamente para fins de análise e não será partilhada com terceiros. Poderão ser incluídas no relatório final pequenas citações anónimas. Os dados pessoais de contacto serão armazenados separadamente dos dados da entrevista e mantidos inacessíveis a terceiros.

Estou ciente de que posso revogar este consentimento a qualquer momento.

Nestes termos, concordo com a realização da entrevista e autorizo que seja gravada, transcrita, anonimizada e analisada.

Nome, apelido & data:

Assinatura: