

The Professional Paths Development in Polish Cultural Organizations From Female Perspective

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Abstract: The last decades have been characterized by numerous changes in the functioning of the organizations. One of them concerns the understanding of the organizational roles of women who, initially identified with lower administrative staff, began to use specialist and managerial positions more and more often and more effectively. Despite what numerous studies have highlighted the increase in the participation of women in leadership positions in organizations is still slow, even in sectors with high feminization rates. This paper focuses on one of the most feminized organizations in the economy – public cultural organizations. On the one hand, they are perceived as traditional, stiff, boring, and by some, even unnecessary organizations. On the other hand, people perceive them as progressive, inspiring, and extremely important from the viewpoint of broadly understood social development and thus consider them as ‘friendly’ for marginalized groups, including women. This paper presents the findings of a research conducted between January 2021 and April 2022 among cultural workers in Poland. The research was based on a survey among 512 public cultural organizations and 20 biographic interviews with female managers working in various cultural organizations in Poland. The purpose of this research was to map the organizational environment of Polish cultural and arts managers. The study provided rich empirical material documenting the impact of the far-reaching gendered nature of work in public cultural organizations, which influences the professional development of women in these workplaces. Additionally, and what makes Polish case interesting to study, is the context of the research. As proven by this study, although, previously functioning in Poland socialist system, supported the professional activation of women, the transformation period 1989 significantly slowed down those processes and consequently in some sectors of economy even deepened existing inequalities. Public cultural organizations, according to participants of those studies, are its example. The findings presented in this paper broaden the knowledge about both gender inequality in cultural industries and theory of gendered organizations. The main contribution of the study revealed career development challenges for women working in public cultural organizations.

Keywords: Gender inequality in cultural organizations, Gendered organization, Leadership, Cultural workers, Cultural organizations

1. Introduction

Recently more and more researchers pay attention to the changes that have occurred in defining the organizational roles of women. Women who were initially identified with lower administrative staff, begun to reach more and more effectively also for specialist and managerial positions in organizations (Klenke, 2017; Olko, Filip, 2016). At the same time, when analysing the structure of the economy, it can be noticed that there are sectors with a high level of feminization. The research run by UNESCO (2017) showed that in 58% of countries with available data (there were data collected from 197 countries), there are more women working in cultural organizations compared to those in other sectors. However, as some studies show (e.g., Dodd, 2012), this does not mean that professional development in this sector is easier for women and there is no dependence suggesting that they more often occupy senior managerial positions. This makes the phenomenon worth exploring. Although there are some studies that look at the situation of women in cultural organizations (e.g. Anheier, 2009; Dodd, 2012; Hesmondhalgh & Baker, 2015; Góral, 2021) they are mostly quantitative studies that seek to map the phenomenon’s scale. Most of the research focusing on situation of women in creative industries deals primarily with business organizations such as media or advertising (Martin, Jerrard & Wright, 2018; Dodd, 2012; Banks & Milestone, 2011; Swandson & Wise, 2000). Also it can be noticed that, with notable exceptions (e.g., Balwin & Ackerson, 2017; Góral 2022), scholars have said little so far about the direct perspective of those working in public organizations in the sector. This research gap motivates the selection of this subject for analysis.

The research problem posed for the purpose of this paper is: How, in context of gender equality, the organizational environment of Polish cultural and arts managers looks like? To answer this research problem, the research among cultural workers in Poland was conducted. The research was based on a survey among 512 public cultural organizations and 20 biographic interviews with female managers working in various public cultural organizations in Poland. For the purpose of the research cultural organizations are understood as those organizations that deal with both the production of cultural goods and its dissemination. This includes various forms of organization, for example theatre, cinema, film organization, museum, library, opera, operetta, philharmonic, orchestra, cultural centre, artistic centre, art gallery, research and documentation

centre (Markusen, Schrock, 2006). By public cultural organizations are in this study meant those that are publicly funded and thus are part of public sector. The purpose of this research was to reflect on the organisational environment of Polish cultural and arts managers from the perspective of women who work in the sector. The study provided rich empirical material documenting the impact of the far-reaching gendered nature of work in public cultural organizations, which influences the professional development of women in these workplaces. The research serves as an introduction to further, more extensive studies on women in cultural organizations.

The results of the research presented in this paper fill in the research gap of the evident lack of scientific data on the functioning of women in organisations. Caroline Criado Perez (2019) shows in her study that there exist hundreds of studies and analyses on various aspects of life, including organizational life, based on data about men as the default social actors. Meanwhile, lack of data on women results in their systematic discrimination in all areas of life. Thus, it seems reasonable to explore the phenomenon of gender diversity in the authorities of Polish public cultural organizations.

The paper is arranged in the following manner: the deliberations begin with a theoretical reflection on women's presence in cultural organizations and underrepresentation of women in leadership positions in organizations. Next, the method and results of the study are presented. This is followed by a discussion and conclusions.

2. Theoretical Background

The nature of a cultural organization is inherently gendered as it does not operate in a void but is part of existing social structures. It is worth noting that when analysing the structure of the economy, it can be noticed that there are sectors where the path of women to management positions seems faster and easier. An example of this is, among others, the culture sector. In their research Helmut Anheier (2009) or David Hesmondhalgh and Sarah Baker (2015) underline the high level of feminization of this sector. According to the latest data of the Polish Central Statistical Office (2019) and studies conducted by Góral (2021) more than half of the staff working in organizations operating in the field of culture, entertainment and leisure in Poland is women. It should not be a surprise, as some studies show, that public cultural organizations are considered "safe and quiet" workplaces, mainly because of the stability of employment, which is believed to be the main object of interest for women (Mc Tavish and Miller, 2009; UNESCO, 2017). Cultural organizations are also commonly perceived as a working space offering major freedom of activity, creativity, higher democratisation of management processes and willingness to experiment, manifested for example by lack of fixed working hours or the possibility to work in a project mode (Banks, Gill, Taylor, 2013), which, according to many researchers, helps engage the groups that are marginalised in the labour market, including women (UNESCO, 2017). However, those working models, as underlined by Dodd (2012) seem to be problematic for women and when studied deeper they do not seem to facilitate the career paths of women in the sector.

Similar conclusions can be drawn from other studies. As underlined by Balwin and Ackerson (2017) while looking closer at the organizational structure of cultural organizations, especially those publicly funded one can notice low representation of women in managerial positions. The typical head of a public cultural organization is assumed to be a white man with little responsibility for care work outside of his career (Szreder, 2016, Sudół, 2020). Although public cultural organizations constantly change and respond to external economic, social, political and demographical pressures, including those related to the promotion of diversity, as indicated by Simon (2012), these primarily manifest in relation to the external environment of these organizations, especially to the audience: opening to increasingly diverse recipient groups and their needs, expanding the diversity of exhibited works, and developing broad cooperation (Wiggins, 2004; Simon, 2010; Kemp & Poole, 2016). Meanwhile, questions about gender equality and inclusion related to staff remain largely unanswered. It is similar as to other sectors of economy, also those with low representation of women. Researchers note that, despite the implementation and promotion of anti-discrimination regulations and a growing awareness of the leadership skills of women, their share in leadership positions in organizations is increasing only at a slow pace (Lips, Keener, 2007). According to the Global Gender Gap Report 2020, the indicator of women's share in leadership positions (not broken down into sectors) has been one of the slowest ones to change over the years, for example compared to such indicators as access to education, medical care or share in the labour market in general.

Although scientific literature on the advantages of having women in managerial positions in organizations is quite limited, there are some studies showing that gender diversity in terms of leadership is beneficial for organizations. For example, the research conducted by Adler (2001) and Catalyst (2004) in the USA revealed a

positive correlation between the presence of women in managerial positions and the profitability of organizations. The results of research conducted by Singh and Vinnicombe (2003) in the United Kingdom also highlight a positive correlation between the presence of women in executive positions in the examined organizations and their high market value. Kupczyk (2009), too, notes the importance of women-managers for the success of organizations. Women are behind 83% of consumer purchases and companies that employ women, in managerial positions, can better understand the gender complexity of the market and better tailor their products and services to the needs of potential customers. However, the existing studies on gender diversity in leadership positions focus mainly on business organizations. There were no similar studies conducted so far in cultural organizations.

Considering this theoretical background, it seems necessary to fill in the research gap of the evident lack of scientific data on the functioning of women in various types of organizations, especially in managerial positions. To fill in this research gap the the purpose of this research was to reflect on the organisational environment of Polish cultural and arts managers from the perspective of women who work in the sector.

3. Method

The purpose of this research was to reflect on the organizational environment of Polish cultural organizations from female perspective. To achieve the set goal and solve the research problem (How, in context of gender equality, the organizational environment of Polish cultural organizations looks like?) the following research questions were formulated:

RQ1: What is the scale of differences in the level of participation of women in top managerial positions in public cultural organizations in Poland?

RQ2: According to women working in public cultural organizations in Poland, what are the professional development paths in this sector?

RQ3: What is, in the opinion of women working in public culture organizations, the impact of the gender structure of the organizational environment of cultural organizations on the development of women's career paths in cultural organizations?

To achieve the set research objective, mixed research was conducted: quantitative with the use of surveys (Babbie, 2013; Wieczorkowska-Wierzbińska, Wierzbiński, Król, 2015) and qualitative, based on 20 biographic interviews with female managers working in various public cultural organizations in Poland. The research was carried out in two stages.

The first stage of the research was quantitative in nature. The surveys were collected from 512 public cultural organizations, which were selected for the study according to the following key: (1) all public cultural organizations organized by the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage, i.e. 71 organizations; (2) all public cultural organizations co-run by the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage, i.e. 47 organizations; (3) all public cultural organizations whose organizers (individually or in cooperation with a lower-level organization) are provincial governments, i.e. 181 organizations; (4) all public cultural organizations whose organizers or co-organizers are municipal governments in voivodship cities, i.e. 213 organizations. Quantitative analysis of the collected material allowed to obtain numerical and percentage data, which were presented in tabular form. Such a presentation of the collected material enabled a comparative analysis of the collected data and an answer to the first of the research questions posed.

In the second stage of the study, it was decided to look deeper in order to understand the phenomenon noticed during first stage of the research. For this purpose interviews with women working in cultural organizations were conducted. To provide a purposive sample, twenty women were invited to the study. They were all managers with at least medium-level managerial positions at Polish public cultural organizations, which allowed providing rich narratives within a specific context through shared sectoral characteristics (Krueger, Reilly, & Carsrud, 2000). The details of the respondents are presented in Table 1. This research strategy allowed to learn in detail the experiences of women who reached at least medium-level managerial positions in their professional careers in the culture sector and to partly explain the observed phenomena as they are seen by people from the system (Welman & Kruger, 1999; Wilhoit & Kisselburgh, 2016).

Table 1: Research Participants' Characteristics

	Name of the Respondent	Type of cultural institution in which she is currently working	Years in the sector	Role of the Institution	Additional Information
1	Maria	museum	20	Deputy Director	1 child in preschool age; husband/partner; additionally associated with NGOs; artist
2	Anna	theater	10	Department Manager	2 children in school and preschool age; husband/partner
3	Marta	cultural center	17	Director	1 child in school age; husband/partner
4	Aleksandra	museum	15	Department Manager	3 children in school and preschool age; husband/partner
5	Ilona	museum	8	Department Manager	1 child in preschool age; husband/partner; associated with NGOs
6	Kamila	theater	12	Deputy Director	2 children in school and preschool age; husband/partner
7	Monika	cultural center	6	Department Manager	1 child in preschool age; husband/partner; associated with NGOs
8	Magda	museum	5	Department Manager	1 child in nursery; husband/partner; artist
9	Agnieszka	cultural center	9	Deputy Director	1 child in school age; husband/partner; artist
10	Iwona	museum	13	Department Manager	2 children in school and preschool age; husband/partner
11	Sabina	museum	17	Senior Specialist	2 children of school and preschool age; husband/partner; associated with NGOs; Ph.D. candidate
12	Aldona	cultural center	10	Director	1 child in school age; husband/partner
13	Fiona	museum	15	Deputy Director	3 children in school and preschool age; husband/partner
14	Malwina	cultural center	12	Festival Director / Department Manager	husband/partner; associated with NGOs
15	Mila	cultural center	13	Department Manager	husband/partner
16	Karo	museum	10	Department Manager	Single / no family obligations
17	Sara	cultural center	20	Department Manager	2 children; husband/partner
18	Dana	museum	15	Department Manager	husband/partner
19	Ola	museum	18	Department Manager	Single / no family obligations; PhD student
20	Nora	Theater	15	Director	2 children in school age; husband/partner

Source: Own study

The material collected during the second stage of the research was studied in a way to highlight moments in which participants defined themselves and articulated related goals, confusions, or tensions, which were collected as themes comparable to previous research on what it means to be a woman and work in a public cultural organization, what it means to be a woman manager, and how to navigate your career at workplaces. This narrative highlighted the career paths of women in culture organizations look like and how their stories are interpreted by women who experienced them in context of the gender structure of the organizational environment of cultural organizations. This material allowed to answer the second and third of the research questions.

4. Research Results

4.1 The Gender Structure Among Managers of Polish Cultural Organizations

The research showed that in over 90% of the surveyed public cultural organizations, women account for over 50% of all people employed in managerial, administrative and technical positions (Table 2). The highest percentage was noticed among employees for whom the local self-government is the organizer (municipalities). A higher percentage of women among the employees of the surveyed cultural organizations were also noticed among non-artistic cultural organizations, i.e., museums, libraries, art galleries, community centers as well as documentation and research centers. The greater share of men among those employed in artistic cultural organizations, which included theatres, philharmonics, operas, artistic ensembles and choirs, and orchestras, as shown in the research, was largely since a significant proportion of jobs in these organizations are related to, among others, stage, lighting and sound systems, and these are most often occupied by men.

Table 2: Share of Women in Managerial Positions Among Employees in Public Cultural Organizations, Broken Down by the Organizer of the Cultural Organizations

Cultural organization by organizer	Number of cultural organizations included in the research	The number of cultural organizations for which women constitute over 50% of employees	% of cultural organizations for which women constitute over 50% of employees	The number of cultural organizations where men account for over 50% of employees	% of cultural organizations for which men constitute over 50% of employees
Total	225	204	90%	21	10%
Cultural organizations organized by the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage	28	25	89%	3	11%
Cultural organizations for which Ministry of Culture and National Heritage is co-organizer	16	15	94%	1	6%
Cultural organizations organized by the provincial government	76	65	85%	11	15%
Cultural organizations organized by the commune self-government (municipalities)	105	99	94%	6	6%

Source: Own study

Research has clearly shown that despite the high percentage of women among employees of public cultural organizations, regardless of the type of cultural organization represented or the type of organizer, the share of women in top management positions is lower (Table 3). This is most evident in the case of cultural organizations organized by the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage. Women are directors in only 12 out of 71 cultural organizations of this type, which is 17% of all organizations. Only one woman is the director of a national museum, which is generally considered the most prestigious type of organization to work at in the sector. The share of women in managerial positions increases along with the lowering of the administrative rank of the organizer, and so in the case of cultural organizations co-organized by the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage it is 25%, for those cultural organizations, for those organized by the provincial government it is 33%, and for organizations organized by the municipal government it is 37%.

The share of women in the positions of deputy directors is higher comparing to the top management level. Regardless of the organizer of the cultural organization, over 50% of all deputy director positions in the surveyed cultural organizations are held by women. Interestingly, the positions of chief accountant in cultural organizations are dominated by women - in over 93% of the surveyed cultural organizations these positions are held by women.

Table 3: Share of Women in top Managerial Positions in Public Cultural Organizations, Broken Down by the Organizer of the Cultural Organization

Cultural organization by organizer	Number of cultural organizations included in the research	number of women holding top management positions (director)	% share of women among people holding the highest managerial positions (director)	Total number of positions of vice-directors of the organizations included in the survey	Number of women vice-directors	% share of women among vice-directors	% share of women among persons performing the functions of chief accountant
Cultural organizations organized by the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage	71	12	17%	106	55	52%	93%
Cultural organizations for which Ministry of Culture and National Heritage is co-organizer	47	12	25%	47	14	30%	92%
Cultural organizations organized by the provincial government	181	71	33%	148	83	56%	92%
Cultural organizations organized by the commune self-government (municipalities)	213	84	37%	135	74	55%	93%

Source: Own study

The share of women in managerial positions increases significantly as the level in the organizational structure is lowered. Over 90% of managerial positions (heads of departments, teams) are held by women. They are the least represented at this level in cultural organizations co-organized by the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage, however, the indicator still exceeds 79% there, which is a significant change compared to the data on top-level managerial functions in the surveyed organizations.

4.2 The Professional Development Paths in Cultural Organizations From Women's Perspective

The picture drawn from quantitative research was completed with the data gathered during the interviews with women working in public cultural organizations in Poland. As shown during the first stage of the research, the share of women in managerial positions in public cultural organizations is inversely proportional to the number of women working in these organizations. In order to understand this phenomenon 20 women working in managerial positions in public cultural organizations were interviewed about their professional development paths.

According to my respondents, working in the culture sector is ruled by its own rules. Maria says *it is working with the 'creative matter'. It requires creativity in different fields and dimensions. It is not only about the process of designing certain activities, meaning their 'content', but also about organization.* However, working in cultural organizations is not only about engaging in the process of creating and enjoying art. It is also, and often mainly as underlines by my respondents, about managing cultural activities and that is, considering how art is being created, a complex matter. What was initially appreciated by them: a diverse and flexible work environment often turned out for my respondents to be a trap, as some superiors quickly exploited the respondents' willingness to work flexible hours, weekends, and travel, thus making them always stay at work. Besides substantive duties related to the implementation of artistic projects, work in cultural organizations involves administrative and technical duties: *"The curator, the manager, the technical staff member – they are one and the same person"* (Agnieszka).

Respondents felt that additional duties indirectly related to their scope of responsibilities weighed heavily on them and distracted them from 'actual work'. Anna, Ilona and Monika emphasized they were often expected to perform additional, mainly administrative duties, that were assigned to them as they were women. For example, they were expected to provide emotional support to new employees and those in difficult situations, accompany guests, serve coffee or prepare rooms for meetings and gatherings organized by superiors. These duties were somehow "inscribed" in work in culture and were treated as obvious. As underlined by respondents, often those additional tasks did not support them during their professional development, but on the contrary, they were seen as a burden. It was particularly heavy when the respondents had to increasingly balance their professional with nonprofessional work, namely family and private life. Nevertheless, they felt they could not refuse additional involvement, hoping it would positively influence their professional position in the future and appreciation from superiors.

The respondents felt that the professional development at their workplaces was difficult and often incomprehensible for women, especially progression to management positions. Karo emphasized in her story that it was only the third time that she managed to receive a promotion to a managerial position in the museum, despite her belief that in previous attempts she had been the optimal candidate for this position:

"It was only in the third attempt that I became Department Head. The first two times someone else was always chosen – a man – although I am not sure whether it mattered. I was always the better substantive candidate: I had knowledge, experience ... but other arguments won, such as longer or closer acquaintance with the director. It was only when they failed that the director became convinced of me and chose me: the person with the best knowledge and experience" (Karo).

Many similar stories were told during the interviews. The respondents underlined that full availability and presence in the right circles of the organization's decision makers and artists were often key, which was difficult for the respondents, given the workload of additional tasks they were given. Also, meetings of the 'inner circles' often took place during weekends or late evening hours, so joining them was difficult for those women who had to take care for additional duties as a part of their private lives. The knowledge about possible promotion opportunities was equally important, and this knowledge was often restricted to directors' inner circles of acquaintances and did not reach other employees. Iwona underlined that the opportunities for raising qualifications at her workplace were supposedly universal, while in practice, only the select few whom the director arbitrarily considered promising could raise their qualifications, thus limiting development possibilities for the rest. The limited and often discretionary access to development opportunities and unclear promotion criteria often demotivated the respondents: *"If you won't discover what you can do in the first few years and start pursuing it later, then you doesn't really care anymore and you start looking for another job"* (Sabina).

5. Discussion and Conclusions

The study showed also that despite numerous changes in recent decades regarding the approach to organizational roles, especially highlighting the changes that occurred in the organizational roles of women (Klenke, 2017), there can still be found evidence in public cultural organizations that corroborate the notion cultural workplaces are increasingly dependent on the retraditionalized "incitement of family relations of appropriation" (Adkins, 1999, p.132). Women face numerous challenges in their professional development in this sector, thus complicating their career paths. The fact that they significantly outnumber men in public cultural organizations does not change this situation.

The conducted research shows that women in public cultural organizations, although dominate among staff members, occupy top management positions less often than men, while middle management positions are more available to them. Thus, based on the conducted research, it can be concluded that despite the clear visible numerical advantage of women employed in public cultural organizations, there is a large disproportion in terms of their number in top management positions in these organizations. This phenomenon may indicate the existence of the so-called "glass ceiling" (Ballenger, 2010; Legato, Glezerman, 2017) and "sticky floor" (Khwaja, Eddy, Ward, 2017). Using these metaphors, researchers define invisible barriers that make it difficult for marginalized groups, including women, to reach managerial positions - this phenomenon increases the higher the position in the organization is concerned.

The research allowed building a general model of women's participation in managerial positions in public cultural organizations in Poland: men dominate in the highest managerial positions - directors, if women appear on them, it is usually as deputies. This tendency is more clearly visible in organizations supervised by the Ministry of Culture and Cultural Heritage. Meanwhile, in relation to public cultural organizations operating on a smaller scale, although the trend is still visible, it is not so clear. The results of the conducted research showing the imbalance in the distribution of power in organizations seem to reflect a broader trend, also characteristic of other sectors of the economy, including those with a high level of feminization, such as higher education (Sulkowski et al., 2019) or the social sector (Davidson, Burke, Richardsen, 2011). Regarding the cultural sector, the observed trend is also characteristic of other countries, e.g. Great Britain (Dodd, 2012; Skillset, 2010), Germany, France and Italy (Anheier, 2017). One can even be tempted to say that it looks like a universal trend. Admittedly, looking at how this phenomenon has changed over time (e.g., UNESCO, 2017), more and more women hold managerial positions in cultural organizations, but changes in this area are progressing slowly. According to the Global Gender Gap Report 2020 (2020), the indicator regarding the share of women in leadership positions (without division into sectors) is one of the slowest changing over the years, compared to, for example, indicators related to issues such as access to education, medical care or participation in the labor market in general.

As underlined by the respondents during the interviews women are facing numerous challenges while trying to develop professionally towards managerial positions in cultural organizations. Those are often linked with still existing stereotypical approach towards social roles assigned to men and women, which is being present not only in private but also professional environment of the society (Klenke, 2017). Some researchers, while trying to understand the studied phenomenon underline the different organization of professional and personal life of women than men, emphasizing that the imbalance in the development of professional career increases with age. Senior management positions are usually reached at a later age (Skillset, 2010; Aluchna, 2013). While at the initial stage of professional career development, its pace is similar for both women and men, when women decide to start a family, discrepancies begin to appear, and men significantly move forward. In many cases, as Orr and Stevenson (2018) emphasize, this difference is never evened out. Managerial positions often require more time commitment, in the case of cultural organizations often in non-standard working hours, which is a greater challenge for women, who must combine professional work with family responsibilities to a greater extent than men (Dodd, 2012).

However, the findings presented in this article are limited in that they are based on limited number of studied cases, including surveys from 512 cultural organizations deepened with the voices of 20 women working in Polish public cultural organizations. Thus, their stories are not generalizable, but they still offer several points of departure for future research. However, it is believed that the insights from this study extend beyond the public cultural organizations, as there are many other examples of similar female experiences in organizations worthy of exploration. Also it would be interesting to explore how women are navigating through their work environment in cultural organizations and how their strategies aimed at reaching top managerial positions look like.

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