

GENDER RELATIONS IN THE SWISS CULTURAL SECTOR

An analysis focusing on cultural practitioners, institutions and associations.

Preliminary study by the Center for Gender Studies, University of Basel and Social Insight GmbH, commissioned by the Swiss Arts Council Pro Helvetia and the Swiss Center for Social Research.

Introduction: Background and methodology

In Switzerland, there is little systematic knowledge on the topic of gender relations¹ in the cultural sector. There is a paucity of gender-specific data and statistics in many cultural institutions and in the area of financial support for culture. For some time, therefore, various cultural sector and cultural policy stakeholders have been motivating for a comprehensive study to investigate equality of opportunity, especially because gender representivity in all relevant areas of cultural production is a goal of Swiss cultural policy. The Swiss Federal Council's cultural policy statement «Kulturbotschaft 2021-2024» makes provision for a more detailed survey of statistical data and the assessment of applicable measures². The purpose of this preliminary study is to generate initial evidence about trends and to develop working hypotheses with the goal of ongoing data collection and a comprehensive Switzerland-wide study.

Given the paucity of existing analyses and research in this area, the preliminary study was restricted to a selective quantitative analysis. Gender relations were examined in four cultural disciplines: performing arts (i.e. dance and theatre), literature, music and the visual arts; in each case the survey looked at between four and six selected cantons³. The study analysed information and data from a total of 38 cultural institutions and organisations (including festivals), 16 industry and producer associations and 17 professional associations. The study also examined 828 awards and grants in 14 cantons and at Federal level from 2000 to 2020. In addition, 27 qualitative interviews and 14 technical discussions were undertaken across the four disciplines in order to interpret the quantitative results appropriately. These qualitative elements are excluded from this summary.

The quantitative data led to three findings:

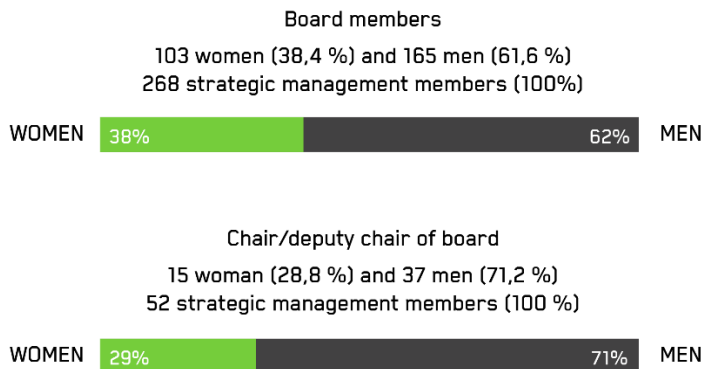
Finding 1: women are under-represented in leadership positions

The initial indication is that the cultural sector is no different when it comes to the under-representation of women in senior positions. Women on average are under-represented in leadership roles. At strategic management and board level of the cultural institutions and organisations examined in the analysis, women are in the board chair position in only 28.8 percent of cases across all four disciplines. Women make up only 10 percent more (38.4 percent) of board members at cultural institutions. It is important to mention here that the literature discipline has a balanced gender ratio at executive levels while women are significantly under-represented in the other three disciplines. The laggard is the music discipline with only 8.3 percent of chair and deputy chair positions at music institutions and festivals held by women.

¹ The expression "gender relations" is defined as the manner in which relations between different genders in specific historical constellations are socially constructed and institutionalised. This study is limited to the investigation of gender relations between men and women as the study itself was not able to establish data about non-binary persons.

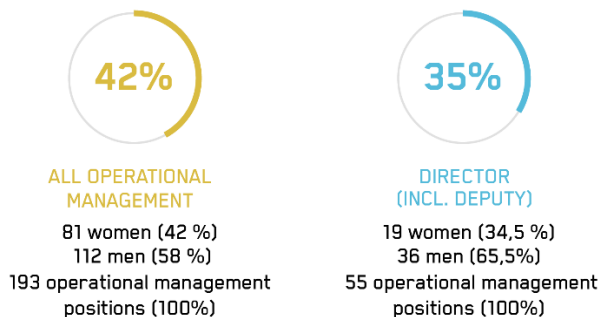
² «Botschaft zur Förderung der Kultur in den Jahren 2021-2024 (Kulturbotschaft 2021-2024)», Article 1.4.2.1.

³ Performing arts: Zurich, Solothurn, St Gallen, Fribourg and Geneva; literature: Aargau, Thurgau, Graubünden and Valais; music: Lucerne, Bern, Schaffhausen, Appenzell Ausserrhoden, Ticino and Vaud; and visual arts: Baselstadt, Baselland, Appenzell Innerrhoden, Glarus, Jura and Neuchâtel.



Graphic 1: Strategic management (board chair/members) at cultural institutions & organisations

In the cultural sector, women have more visibility at the operational level. The number of women in operational management at cultural institutions is trending towards a balanced gender ratio at 42 percent. Even here, significant differences are found between the disciplines. The literature discipline even has more women than men overall at management level (62.5 percent), while the music discipline is distinguished by its dismally low ratio of 31.4 percent. This drops to 0 percent for directorships at music institutions and organisations that participated in the survey.



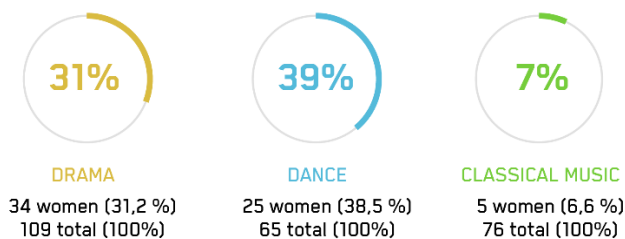
Graphic 2: Operational management at cultural institutions & organisations

Another finding from the research is that there is a correlation between under-representation and the size of cultural organisations: the larger the institution, the less often there will be a woman in the executive position. Large institutions in the theatre and visual arts very seldom have a female director. By contrast, the number of medium to small institutions with women directors is as high as 60 percent.

The situation in professional associations and in industry and producer associations is similar. In general, women are under-represented in strategic and operational management positions. Women make up only 29.2 percent of chair and deputy chair positions, 39.3 percent of board members and 31.3 percent at operational management levels.

Finding 2: Female artists and their work have lower visibility and receive awards less often

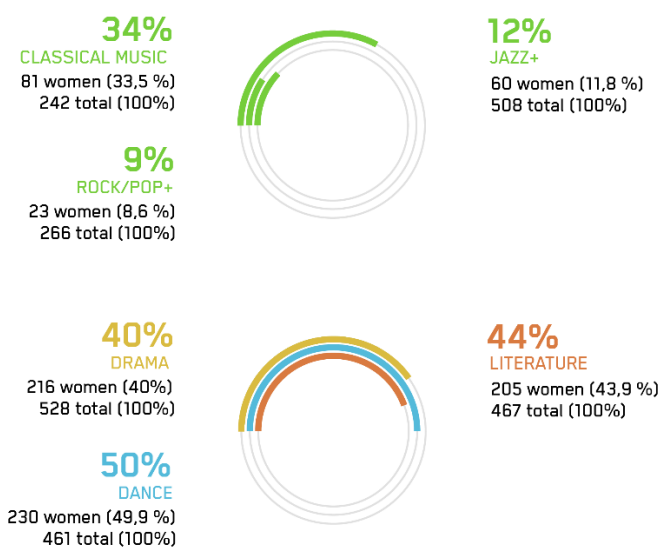
In the purely artistic activities, there is also a strong predominance of stereotypical male or female activities. The positions for artistic direction and writing are largely the preserve of men while women are largely active as performers. In the 2018/19 performing arts season, the share of positions held by women at the level of direction and choreography was in the region of one third. The profile of women as conductors in classical music is especially low. Here the ratio of women is 6.6 percent.



Graphic 3: Ratio of women in artistic management positions (direction/choreography/conducting)

A similar scenario faces female playwrights, writers and composers; these careers are also difficult for women to enter. Only 15 percent of stage productions performed were written by women, while virtually no classical music composed by women was performed; the share is only 2.3 percent.

By contrast, there is more equality when it comes to stage performances and reading appearances; in the performing arts and literature the gender ratios tend to be closer to a balance. Women appeared in approx. 40–50 percent of performance roles. However, in none of the disciplines investigated did women exceed a ratio of 50 percent. For art exhibitions, by contrast, the ratio of women was a maximum of one third (31 percent for group exhibitions, 26 percent for solo exhibitions). There is virtually no profile for women in music. The ratio of women performers (soloists and orchestra/backing musicians) is around 34 percent for classical music, about 12 percent for jazz and between 8.6 and 12.8 percent for rock/pop.





Graphic 4: Ratio of women in performances and exhibitions (Actors | Solists | Artists | Writers)

The chances of receiving an award or a grant for their work or performances are similarly bleak for women. Of the 828 prizes investigated, 37.1 percent were awarded to women. The situation is balanced in the theatre/dance/performing arts discipline (50.5 percent of prizes went to women), while music is again the laggard – only 25.8 percent of awards went to women.

Finding 3: women earn less than men

The unequal distribution of men and women in various levels of management, career groups and responsibilities is attended by gender-specific distinctions regarding decision-making scope, social recognition and remuneration. Unfortunately there is very little concrete data available from the individual disciplines for current salary conditions that would make it possible to derive exact evidence. However, because the size of the institutions determines budgets for salaries, appointments, auditions, conditions of employment, etc. it must be assumed that there is a significant salary distinction between men and women. Further evidence of salary inequality is suggested by the many qualitative interview responses criticising the absence of transparency when it comes to fees and compensation.

The Swiss performers association «Schweizerischen Bühnenkünstlerverband» (SBKV) is the only association that compiles salary data for its members. The data shows that women receive significantly lower incomes compared to men. Many of the associations approached in the study referred to the «Suisseculture Sociale» studies, a survey series that investigated the income and social security of cultural practitioners in 2006 and 2016. Unfortunately, this survey provides very little data on gender relations. Based on calculations using this data, it is possible to conclude that incomes are precarious across disciplines and for all genders. One third of cultural practitioners earn less than CHF 21 150 gross per year (35.3 percent of women and 33.6 percent of men). In addition, only one quarter of women cultural practitioners (26.7 percent) receive a gross annual salary of CHF 21 150 or more while for men the figure is one third (36.4 percent)⁴. This limited data does provide an initial indication of a gender pay gap that favours men, but additional research in this area is essential.

⁴ The income figures are for cultural practitioners in all disciplines with cultural work as their primary source of income. The remaining 38 percent of women and 30 percent of men receive income from cultural work on a part-time basis.

Conclusion and recommendations

The manifest under-representation of and lack of visibility for women in the cultural sector means that Switzerland loses a significant potential in skills and abilities in both artistic and management areas. It can be assumed that one central cause of this imbalanced situation is the still strongly influential yardstick of lifestyle and career configurations defined by men in the arts and cultural sector. This deep-set logic has a specific bearing on the issues of the compatibility of a career with family life and hierarchical power relations. Gender stereotypes of masculinity and femininity therefore still have the effect of an unconscious bias in the cultural sector and are an obstacle on the road to enduring structural transformation.

There is therefore, after this preliminary study, an urgent need to survey data about gender relations in the Swiss cultural sector more comprehensively. Targeted measures can only be developed and implemented once the gaps in knowledge and data have been eliminated.

The following are recommendations:

1. Data about incomes and the extent of the gender pay gap must be surveyed in depth.
2. Insight into career trajectories and information about central moments in artistic careers are necessary to understand the reasons artists choose to continue or abandon an artistic career.
3. In a related aspect, the issue of compatibility of family and professional life must be investigated.
4. The issue of financial support at various levels (Federation, cantons, local government) requires greater research taking into account the complexity of funding mechanisms and opportunities.
5. Future research must integrate the areas of education and the universities (accessibility, selection criteria, curricula, teaching staff, number of students and graduates).

In the medium term, the goal must be the continuous surveying of facts and figures in order to be able to identify developments and trends and facilitate corresponding measures, as defined in the Federal Council's cultural policy statement. Structural transformation to achieve gender equality will only be accomplished through ongoing gender monitoring and consequent strategies suitable for the specific contexts and sub-sectors.

Links

Complete study on the [website of the Center Gender Studies at the University of Basel](#).