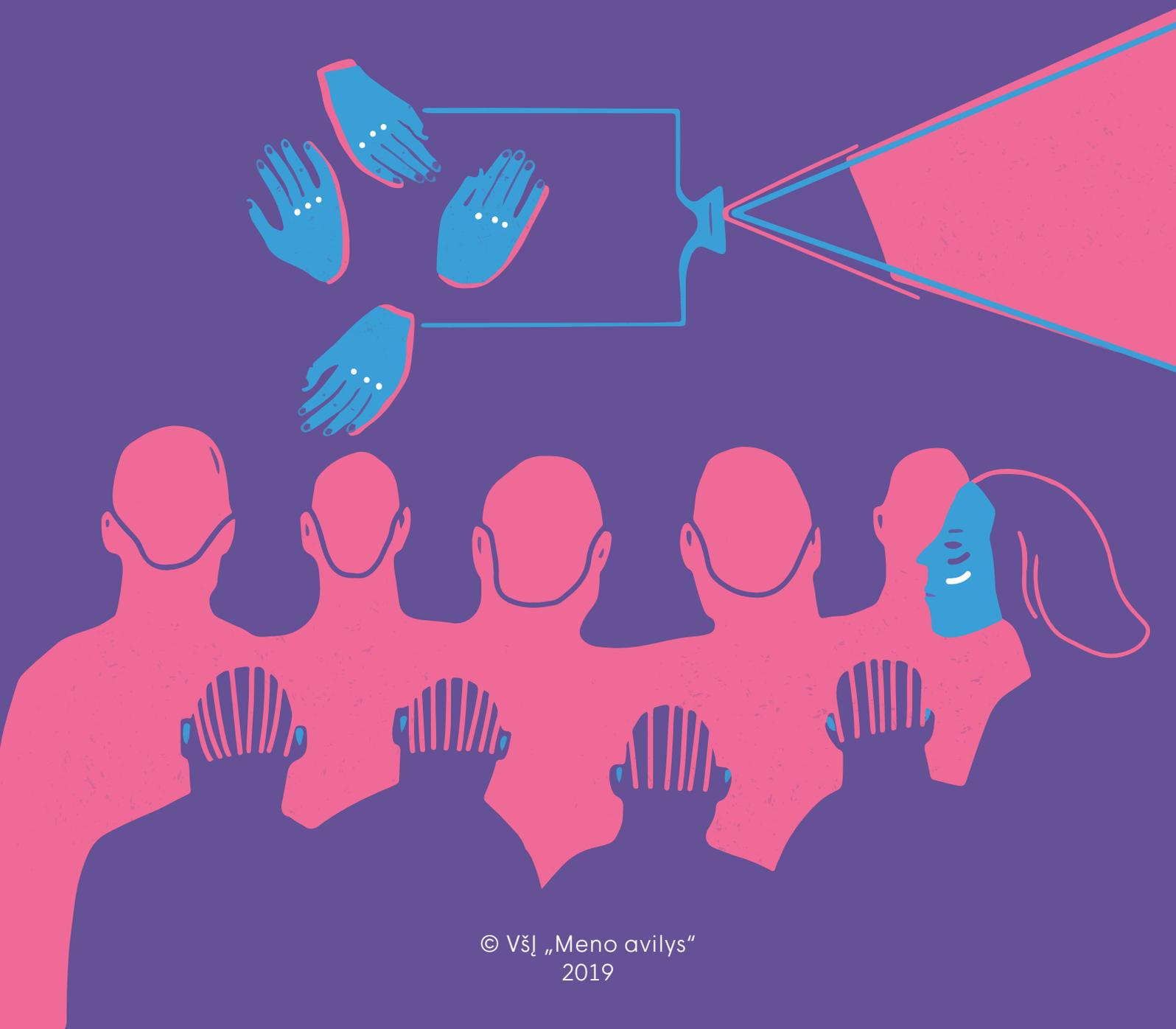


# Women in Lithuanian Film Industry

Research summary



## Summary

Do women and men have equal possibilities to start and continue their professional career in the Lithuanian film industry? What impact does gender have on a cinema profession and the hierarchy of positions? What role does it play when receiving funding for film production or winning awards? We have been looking for the answers to these and other similar questions through the research on the professional status of women in the Lithuanian film industry, attempting to see both positive and negative tendencies in the Soviet (1947-1990) and independent Lithuanian (1991-2018) cinema.

The idea took shape in 2016 and is closely related with the international context of emerging initiatives highlighting the gender aspect and the career of women in film industry. The research "Where are the Female Directors in European Cinema?" conducted in seven countries (Austria, Croatia, France, Germany, Italy, Switzerland, the United Kingdom) and analysing the position of female directors in the film industries in 2006-2013 (commissioned by the European Women's Audiovisual Network (EWA)) had a great impact for the Lithuanian context analysis.

The circumstances in which Lithuanian gender equality study emerged (2016) and in which it was being developed and completed (2018) differ significantly. Even though at the very start, just a handful of scientists and filmmakers were involved in it, eventually the interest of the society, film professionals and international researchers grew. The research was conducted in close cooperation with film industry community, was constantly improved by extremely valuable insights and suggestions. Although such research progress posed its own challenges, the possibility to represent Lithuania and to include it into the relevant contemporary international discussion was an exceptional experience and privilege.

Lithuania is the country of a small film industry, so, compared to other countries, the data can be covered and compared in time, e. g. we have a unique possibility to compare the dynamics of female filmmakers professional status within seven decades and to observe it within different political, cultural and economical contexts.

We hope that this will encourage reasoned debates and contribute to the strengthening of gender equality in Lithuania.

## How do we research?

We chose mixed research methods and employed both quantitative and qualitative research methods bearing in mind the already conducted international research in this field.

During the quantitative research, we collected and analysed gender-related data on in the following spheres: film education (Lithuanian Academy of Music and Theatre), film crews of the productions made in both Soviet and independent periods of Lithuania,

state film funding in 1996-2018 and the granting of the main national film awards (Silver Crane and Oak).

During the qualitative research, we conducted interviews with the women currently as well as formerly employed in the Lithuanian film industry. In total, 21 female film professionals (from 26 to 73 years of age) took part in the research and represented various film set roles and professions: directors, screenwriters, producers, camerawomen, costume designers, film distributors, film programmers, etc. While analysing the data, we used the method of thematic analysis and singled out 5 main topics reflecting the experience of the women working in the film industry. The most relevant and important issues for women (discussed in detail in the qualitative part) include the specificities and peculiarities of work in the film industry, the specificity of the Lithuanian film community, the characteristics of the professional path of female filmmakers as well as the diversity of the attitudes towards gender identity.

A contemporary feminist film theory perspective encouraged us to pay closer attention to the entire film crew, where historically women did not occupy the most prestigious positions and mainly carried out the invisible work. Therefore, in our research we also followed this perspective by collecting and analysing the data not only on the key roles (scriptwriter, director, producer) but also on film set roles such as make-up artists, editors, costume designers, set designers, sound designers, etc.

In our research, we took into consideration the differences among film types (feature film, documentary, animation) and their duration (full length or short film). As far as we know, full-length feature films are traditionally regarded as the highest status type of cinema with the biggest concentration of money and power, whereas documentaries, short feature and animation films hold a lower status. From a historical point of view, most of female directors tend to focus namely on documentaries or short films. As the result, this divide is also really indicative and clearly demonstrates the distribution between gender and filmmaking roles.

This is the first research based on gender approach not only in Lithuania but also in other Baltic countries, i.e. Estonia and Latvia. So far, the statistical information on film crews of the productions made during the Soviet and independence periods has not been collected systematically. We hope the conducted research will become a starting point for further investigations in this field in the Baltic States.

## Conclusions of the research

1. In 1993-2018, film professions chosen by students of LMTA (Lithuanian Academy of Music and Theatre) according to gender remained fairly stereotypical: women chose the studies that are traditionally considered as "feminine" (film /theatre dramaturgy, film studies), whereas men more often chose the specialities traditionally regarded as "masculine": cinematography. The studies of film directing were equally popular with the representatives of both genders, whereas women were prone to select producing more often than men. The cinematography studies still remain the programme where gender segregation is the most obvious. A slight shift in the selection of studies can be seen from the fact that in 2002-2018 there were few women who studied and graduated cinematography compared to the situation during the first decade of independence, when no women chose this programme.
2. A clear and stable status quo was dominant in the film crews of the Soviet cinema: the main positions of power in a team were held by men, whereas women remained in less visible positions traditionally regarded as feminine. During the independence period, the number of women employed in the film industry has been growing in nearly all positions, including the ones that were once dominated by men: art directors, producers, screenwriters, directors. The only position in which the number of women has been decreasing significantly is the position of an editor. The positions of a make-up artist and costume designers have remained exclusively "feminine," whereas the positions of composers, cinematographers and sound directors have remained exclusively "masculine."
3. The research has revealed significant changes in the positions of women depending on the film categories. Throughout the entire 1947-2017 period, short documentaries and short feature films remained the most favourable spheres for female filmmakers. The position of women in these short film categories is closest to gender equality, when considering the situation from various perspectives, i.e. the general number of women within film crews, the positions held and the state funding allocated to women. Full length feature films are still regarded as the field where the number of women has been growing the most slowly, the disproportion between genders in various film set positions has been the greatest, whereas the funding granted to female directors has been the smallest compared to other types of films.
4. The differences among film production segments are often associated with the symbolic, creative or financial power of a post held. Significant gender disproportion has not been observed in those film production spheres where the position held by an individual is not traditionally attributed to that of power and/or the salary for the performed work is not financially significant.

5. The analysis of the state funding indicators has shown that the situation of women in the Lithuanian film industry in 1996-2018 was gradually improving; however, there are still a lot of spheres where gender equality has not been achieved yet. Continuing dominance of men is evident from the following signs: much bigger activeness of men when submitting applications for most film categories and, correspondingly, a much more significant share of funding granted to male directors; the prevalence of male directors in the creation of full length feature films; an established financial mechanism that is more favourable to men making feature films. The improvement process of the position of women is much slower; however, the number of female directors submitting applications for the funding of films as well as the dominance of female producers in the film industry has been increasing steadily.
6. The professional establishment of film workers is associated with the funding of a specific film category. It is more difficult for women to enter those film production areas that receive better funding and, compared to less financed film production spheres, the number of employed women is much smaller there. In financial terms, the most unequal gender situation can be observed in the category of the most expensive films, i.e. full length feature films. More or less equal gender situation has been noticed in the category of short documentaries, i.e. the category which receives the smallest share of state funding (2% of all the amount of funding).
7. In 2013-2018, female producers received the largest share (around 50%) of all the funding provided by the Lithuanian Film Centre, whereas the other half was distributed among male producers and mixed producer teams. Male producers and mixed teams cooperate more often with male directors, whereas female producers cooperate with male and female directors on a more or less equal basis. This clearly indicates that the striving for gender equality in the film industry is still considered as an exceptionally "women's matter."
8. The currently existing funding allocation mechanism only partly contributes to gender inequality. On the one hand, gender does not play an essential role in the granting of funding for different gender directors, i.e. both men and female directors receive similar amounts of money for the production of a specific film. On the other hand, the funding mechanism is more favourable to men who wish to make full length feature films that are traditionally more expensive, whereas women are encouraged to create less costly documentaries. There is a lack of systematic gender mainstreaming in the encouragement of both genders to submit applications for all film categories as well as in the funding allocation process.
9. The national film award Silver Crane mirrors closely the situation in film sets and also confirms the tendency that female filmmakers' position is much better in short films and much worse in full length feature films. The smallest numbers of women were among the nominees for the categories "The Best Cinematographer," "The Best Set

Designer” and “The Best Composer.” The proportion of women among the winners of the categories “The Best Cinematographer” and “The Best Composer” represents the general proportion of women in these positions, whereas the number of female nominees and winners in the category “The Best Set Designer” could be bigger than it is now taking into consideration their contribution. A woman nominee has more chances to win if she competes in a category that traditionally holds less symbolic power (“The Best Short Film,” “The Best Student Film,” “The Best Cartoon,” and “Professional Work”). The cinematographic awards (Oak Awards) confirm the general tendency that the profession of a cinematographer is regarded as exceptionally masculine.

10.

The general data statistics for 1996-2018 show the dropout tendency of women in the professional activities according to their acquired specialisation, i.e. there were more female graduates than women who managed to establish themselves in the film industry and receive appreciation for their professional achievements (e.g. the Silver Crane Award). The largest dropout percentage of women in the film industry can be observed in full length feature films production; whereas, the number of women who established themselves in short films production is significantly bigger.

11.

21 current or former female employees of the Lithuanian film industry took part in the qualitative research (from 26 to 73 years of age). The representatives of varying professions participated in in-depth interviews, whereas the collected data was processed with the help of thematic analysis. The following five key issues defining the professional experience of the research participants were distinguished:

- “You just have to be a soldier during the filming”: the specifics of work in the film industry
- The Lithuanian film industry is a small and specific community
- “One company – one child, another company – another child”: typical trajectories of a professional path
- “You should make a girlish film”: gender equality with exceptions
- “No other job is so interesting”: the magic of the cinema

All these topics reveal the most relevant questions posed by female cinema professionals. The working environment is highly specific and one must adapt to it: the small size of the Lithuanian film industry contributes to the development of a closely interrelated community; the blurring of the work-life balance; still detectable manifestations of gender inequality in the film industry; the appeal of the film industry as the sphere providing a lot of creative freedom as well as plenty of scope for improvement.

12.

The two key factors explain the dropout tendency of female professionals from the film industry, i.e. the specifics of work, and maternity. The nature of work in the film industry (long, unregulated working hours, being unable to plan, and the blurring of professional and personal lives) is highly unfavourable to women, especially the ones with families

and children. Small children and the return to work are two most complicated periods for women, when it is highly difficult to adjust professional and personal interests. It is during these two periods that women are most vulnerable in terms of their profession and, if they do not receive adequate support from the side, they choose to withdraw from or are pushed out of the industry. This is when women would most appreciate the help of their relatives, colleagues or structural assistance enabling them to combine family and work.

**13.** The women working in the film industry have mentioned underdeveloped traditions of exchange of experience, which they associate with the small size of the industry causing more fierce competition among the professionals of the same sphere. Even though the research participants understand that women would have a stronger voice if they acted together and supported each other, there is still a lot of room for closer cooperation among female film professionals.

**14.** The research has revealed big differences between generations. The youngest and young generation female professionals expressed a stronger sense of solidarity with other women and were often angry with the submissiveness of women to the behaviour and/or situations degrading them. The young and middle generation research participants expressed the need to unite with other female film professionals in the establishment of associations, trade unions or other kinds of support groups more frequently. The middle and oldest generation women preferred not to stress the importance of the gender issues, which was manifested through a conscious or unconscious refusal to speak about the impact of gender on career. The approach of these women to the discussions on and promotion of gender equality in the film industry was often sceptical and considered as the exaggeration of the current situation. The following differences clearly reveal how the cinema community itself contributes significantly to the shaping of opinions and practices prevalent in the film industry.

**15.** Small size of the Lithuanian film industry creates favourable conditions for the formation of the community; however, being a part of it has not always brought satisfaction. The research participants have expressed numerous reproaches for local film community concerning too tight links with each other, hostility, avoidance of open criticism and insufficient unity. An especially distinct divide has been observed among filmmakers of younger and older generation as well as tension among filmmakers and institutions.

**16.** The following systemic and institutional problems of the industry have been mentioned most frequently: the lack of the efforts promoting this creative industry; a too bureaucratic system; not transparent allocation of finances; manifestations of favouritism/protectionism when allocating funding; the funding that does not ensure sufficient film diversity; incompetence of cinema politicians and, in general, the lack of political initiative to develop cinema; the dependence on external funding sources and available connections.

17. Female filmmakers of various generations (those who worked during the Soviet times and those who worked during the independence period) have expressed their disappointment with the Lithuanian cinema institutions, the indifference of such institutions and the lack of support. This indicates that the approach towards the system and official cinema institutions has remained practically unchanged or has been changing very slowly even over a long period of time.
18. The majority of the research participants have also observed positive changes in the film industry. The following changes were mentioned most frequently: clearer remuneration terms and conditions, the adoption of positive foreign examples concerning the order in a film set, and the change in the attitude of the cinema community manifested through greater attention to each other.
19. Normally, most of the women employed in the film industry do not consider their gender as a problem that has a crucial impact on their profession. Gender becomes a problem for a female film professional when the woman encounters such an opinion or behaviour of the surrounding people that makes her pay attention to the gender and think whether and what impact it has on her professional path. Often this is an openly and/or indirectly discriminating attitude and behaviour, sexist remarks.
20. A man is seen as a “correct” professional standard that any woman employed in the film industry should follow. Being a man, i.e. emotionally stable, logically thinking, rational, able to fight for oneself and the others, is regarded as an ideal starting point for a film industry professional.

Jelena Šalaj  
Lina Kaminskaitė-Jančorienė

*The research “Women in Lithuanian Film Industry” was carried out at the media education and research centre “Meno avilys” and was funded by the Lithuanian Council for Culture. The research team consisted of the following members: Project Manager Dr. Lina Kaminskaitė-Jančorienė, Head for Research Dr. Jelena Šalaj, researchers Nikė Kiškytė and Sandra Zaidova. The data was collected by Veronika Urbonaitė-Barkauskienė and Deimantė Petrulytė. The project partners: Lithuanian Music and Theatre Academy, Lithuanian Centre for Human Rights, Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Lithuania.*