Women in Music: Possibilities and Responsibilities of Cultural Management and Policy[1]

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Abstract: *Previous global research on the participation and share of women in music of the last three decades indicates a wide spectrum of causes and dimensions of inequality and a more difficult professional development path for them, in line with patriarchal social ideas, but also prejudices and stereotypes about youth. Young women in the music scene of Southeastern Europe are treated differently in comparison to their male and older counterparts, while their underrepresentation is often explained by mobilizing the discourses stressing individuality and psychological causes. In contrast to that, this chapter aims to discuss the reach and possibilities of cultural management and policies to influence gender and age equality within the cultural scene in Serbia and Southeastern Europe, as well as to contribute to a more extensive participation of women and youth in cultural production and decision making. This chapter presents the results of the experiment conducted in April and June 2022 when two concerts of young female musicians were conceptualized and organized in Belgrade in the framework of "feminist music management", based on the interviews and focus groups with female musicians of younger generations in Serbia and the region of Southeastern Europe throughout 2021 in both physical and virtual space. The research also comprises the analysis of several important instruments of national cultural policy in Serbia in 2021.*

Keywords: *cultural diversity, cultural rights, gender equality, participation, feminist music management.*

Some of the most important notions of contemporary cultural management and policy are related to improving cultural diversity, cultural rights and democracy, as well as inclusion, accessibility, participation and sustainability. Participation has been one of the key terms in cultural management and policy for decades, but still many stakeholders are satisfied with merely informing the public about the events, and attracting existing

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audiences more often, rather than reaching out to people who are not already taking part (Jancovich 2015).

As stated by Jordi Balta Portoles and Milena Dragicevic Sesic, the protection of cultural rights still has a long way to go globally, regarding active participation in policy design and evaluation, recognition of obstacles that prevent it, as well as equal participation of all disadvantaged groups. Per these authors, some of the tools available for the implementation of the protection of cultural rights are creating forums for participation in decision-making and management, the decentralization of cultural resources and the identification of obstacles and factors which hinder participation in cultural life (2017: 170), and this position was inspiring for the development of this chapter. One of the roles cultural policy can play towards sustainable development is to safeguard and sustain cultural practices and rights (Duxbury, Kangas, De Beukelaer 2017), while sustainable development deals, in culture as in other fields, with the notion of intergenerational and intragenerational equity as well as diversity (Throsby 2017).

This chapter is focused on gender and age equality as part of the mentioned conceptual web of participation, diversity and cultural rights. Gender inequality, still present in the cultural sector globally, and proven, both in unequal pay between men and women in the artistic and cultural sector, as well as in a lack of visibility and voice of women, leads to "societies missing out on talent – in quality and quantity – and lacking a richer diversity of cultural content and forms of artistic expressions" (German Commision for UNESCO 2020: 2). This topic is particularly significant since cultural expressions strongly influence perceptions about gender identities and gender relations (ivi: 3). The German Commission for UNESCO articulates issues of equality two ways: as of *creative equality*, meaning access and participation, and *creative power*, that is, decision-making positions (ivi: 4).

Research has also shown the interrelation between gender stereotyping and inequalities, and barriers, discourses and subtle discrimination related to youth (Adamović et al. 2014). This is not to claim that older women do not face discrimination: on the contrary – research has also shown a strong connection between misogyny and ageism in the wider society (Jankovic 2019), or in music, as in the case of Madonna for example (Mitić 2015) but since this chapter has different focus, this topic has to be put aside.

Existing Research on Age- and Gender (In)Equality in Cultural Life and Policy

A study by Leila Jancovich (2015) showed "a clear disparity in perceptions between those who have engaged in participatory decision-making practices and those who have not. The greatest resistance to the concept exists where there is least experience of it in operation" (ivi: 12). An experiment on youth participation in the [mock] arts budgeting in the Arts Council England's North East regional office showed that there is interest among youth to take part in such processes: "The decisions were said to have been treated with the utmost care and seriousness by those taking part and 'if managed well, it could be dealt with on a much broader level' (Arts Council England staff)" (ivi: 11). Nevertheless, this was unfortunately not introduced elsewhere, nor continued. Even with the knowledge on information and cultural needs and practices of youth, and the resources in-

vested in producing the new (digital) channels for including audiences and improving relationships with communities, cultural institutions and stakeholders in Serbia also do not use these platforms to engage youth and do not focus on this group (Nikolić and Ilčić 2021).

On the other side, the national study on women in public cultural institutions in Serbia (Center for Study in Cultural Development of Serbia 2017) shows women constitute the majority of the workforce in this field in Serbia (58.9% compared to 41.1% of men). The study partially explains this figure by the lack of interest of men to work in the field of culture, which is caused by the poor financial conditions in this sector and poor status of the related professions (ivi: 101). Women are in leadership roles (general managers, members of the governing boards, members of the supervisory boards) mostly on the local level (45.6%), while they lead provincial or national institutions more rarely (around 30%) (ivi: 101–102). Female colleagues in the public cultural sector in Serbia believe the reason behind that is that men have more time for politics, they are more of team-players than women, and also that women themselves are not interested in those positions – 73% would not accept these positions even if offered (ivi: 102). Previous research on young female artists on social media platforms by one of the coauthors of this chapter confirms the self-perceived lack of capacity for self-promotion (Nikolić 2020), as well as low self-efficacy among young female jazz musician in the region (Jovićević and Nikolić 2022).

Even though women in public cultural institutions expect much harsher scrutiny and treatment from colleagues, in line with what they already face (Center for Study in Cultural Development of Serbia 2017), they refused to share any possible experience of gender discrimination with researchers, and at the same time explained that they know how to fight and do not allow to be discriminated (ivi: 70). This contradictory position puts responsibility for possible discrimination or its consequences in the hands of a woman herself, and similar is often showed in the interviews with female musicians in the region of Southeastern Europe (Nikolić 2016 and 2017). The example of women in tourism and events industry in the UK also proved "the riskiness of acknowledging gender inequality in the workplace for women. […] [t]heir eagerness to ensure that men would not feel 'left out', indicates insecurity in relation to their own position as women in masculinist organizations, and the risks of pointing out their femaleness for their own career progression" (Dashper 2019: 554).

Discrimination is nevertheless systematic and institutions bear responsibilities to address it and confront it proactively. In 2021, a gender sensitive analysis of the budget of the Serbian Ministry of Culture was conducted, rooted in the Law on Budget (Zakon o budžetskom sistemu, "Službeni glasnik" 149/2020) which proscribes that "every public institution should make a conscious and directed effort to dissolve negative gender stereotypes and to strengthen gender equality and non-discrimination through their work and through open calls for support to other stakeholders" (translation by the authors) (Swedish Agency for International Development and Cooperation SIDA 2021: 48). It showed, among other, that while women are 2/3 of the employees, there are only 14 female leaders in the 34 national institutions (ivi: 45), as well as that funds for supporting cultural production by and for marginalized groups were reduced by 7% in 2020 (year of Covid19) (ivi: 40). This report relates the dominance of women in the workforce with the ever shrinking resources in the field with the working conditions:

> Working in culture, arts and creative industries is characterized by the intersection of several aggravating factors such as non-formal work, the importance of networking and self-promotion, project-based funding, unstable jobs and highly competitive relations, followed by gender stereotypes (translation by the author) (ivi: 50).

The study underlined that neither "gender neutral" cultural policies nor measures exist and pointed out the necessity of introducing gender sensitive statistics and financial monitoring in the cultural sector, increasing participation of women in decision making and leadership positions, bettering access to resources and reducing the pay gap, fighting against sexual harassment in arts, as well as improving gender relations and stereotypes through cultural production (ivi: 48–51).

Selma Banić and Nina Gojić showed on the example of the Croatian city of Rijeka that over one third of female artists were exposed to mobbing in a work situation, "while ethics commissions, professional associations, and trade unions failed to be efficient allies" (2018: 45). Most of the respondents in that research experienced discrimination based on their gender or gender identification, such as "sexist remarks, insults, disparagement, segregation, being paid less than their male counterparts, subordination to their male colleagues, exclusion from (collective) decision making, exposure to (public) criticism, and inability to get jobs" (ivi: 58–59). Another relevant study in Croatia showed the dynamics of unpaid, underpaid and self-exploiting labor among women in creative industries, its necessity perceived as a choice, as well as the (lack of) appreciation and social value it receives (Barada and Primorac 2014 and 2018). This is especially interesting since female cultural professionals are often engaged in artistic programs and projects empowering other marginalized groups, such as migrants and asylum seekers (Nikolić 2019), working pro bono, for low honoraria and for the benefit of the oppressed communities.

According to the current national research that has included the public, private and independent sector in Serbia (Association of ICCS, in preparation, expected date Dec. 2022), throughout their education almost two thirds of the female artists faced lascivious and unwanted comments, and almost one third unwanted touches; 10% reported that they experienced sexual assault and violence and 6.5% sexual extortion. During their professional career, the percentage of those exposed to lascivious and unwanted comments and sexual extortion is even higher, while unwanted touch and sexual assault is slightly less occurring. It is particularly alarming that more than two thirds of the female cultural professionals in Serbia felt discriminated against in their professional environment as women, and more than 80% believes women are somewhat discriminated against in the field of culture, arts and creative industries in Serbia, with 25% of them expressing that as a fact.

Finally, although women account for the half or more of the total working force in the artistic and cultural field of many countries, the music sector is among those where inequalities also persist in rich countries such as Australia, Germany and Denmark (UNESCO 2019: 80). Even if the numbers of practitioners in the field is rather balanced, other issues exist such as income inequality, inequality in decision-making, gender portrayal, and sexual harassment and personal safety (ivi: 81).

Co-editor of this book and lead researcher of the project "Female Leadership in Music" Iva Nenić described the promising increase of the number of female musicians in the alternative music scene in Serbia and the region (2015). At the same time, she has pointed out the persistence of specific experiences of female instrumentalists, characterized by discontinuity with their predecessors, the skepticism they face regarding their capabilities, talent and skills, the constant reminding of their sex and pointing out their biological characteristic, double standards in comparisons to their male colleagues, and the tiring need to constantly prove their worth, all rooted in the same discriminatory pattern visible in the traditional music practices in the region from the middle age, the period of romanticism and later (Nenic 2019). Even though there are no clear restrictions and bans, women in music do still face implicit and ever present marginalization.

In line with the mentioned research results, during the past years, but primarily during 2021, we collected significant data on the experiences, challenges, obstacles and strategies of young women active in the field of the alternative music genres of rock, jazz, metal etc. in Serbia and the region of Southeastern Europe. In her previous independent and co-authored works, Nikolić researched experiences of inequality of primarily young women in the national music scene in Serbia and the region (Jovićević and Nikolić 2022; Nenić and Nikolić 2022; Nikolić and Gubaš 2013; Nikolić 2016, 2017, 2020). Those researches were conducted through individual and group interviews, analysis of media articles and appearances, as well as statistical data on the representation and participation of women in the relevant music festivals in Serbia and the region, on radio and television stations and programs devoted to alternative and indie music.

The interviews conducted with female musicians have indicated that the patriarchal characteristics of the regional music sector, both in terms of sexism and adultism, are continuously present in the Southeastern European societies in general. They have also indicated the subtle, but still hostile remarks, prejudice-based behaviors and treatment of young women in music, both in the educational and the performing context, the strongly assumed and ever mentioned incompatibility between private and family life, and the whole list of strategies implemented by young female musicians in order to overcome these gendered and age related obstacles. Per interviews, benevolent sexism is a common experience, defined as a seemingly flattering treatment, that is actually based in promoting stereotypes and traditional gender roles, limiting female behavior that is acceptable and positively valued, thus perceiving and framing women as inferior, week and less competent (Todorović 2013: 8–17). Female jazz instrumentalists in the region also face social isolation, incompatibility with social expectations, double marginalization – among male colleagues as well as within the international jazz scene and the mainstream discourse that the responsibility for inequality is on themselves; but they also emphasize the importance of the role models, female solidarity, cooperation, and networking (Jovićević 2022). The following segment digs deeper in some possibilities of the realization of the latter ideas and values in practice.

A Model of Feminist Music Management
– Notes from the Conducted Experiment

Within the research project "Female Leadership in Music", funded by the Science Fund of the Republic of Serbia and conducted by the team of researchers from the Faculty of Music and Faculty of Dramatic Arts of the University of Arts in Belgrade, a concert was planned as one of the action-based research activities. One of the coauthors of this chapter, Tatjana Nikolić was a member of the initial team of FLIM research, and she proposed to Katarina Mitić Minić a collaboration around producing a concert together. Thus the project "Female Leadership in Music" joined forces with the Young Women's Collective FEMIX where Katharina is professionally engaged and where a series of concerts was to be organized during spring 2022. During the preparations, Tatjana took more the role of a researcher and evaluator, while Katarina took the role of a producer and the promoter, although the efforts were joined and both coauthors were engaged in different tasks.

It was agreed among the members of the research team that, based on the inputs collected through interviews, focus groups and observations conducted up to that moment, as well as theoretical research of female leadership, practices, collaborations, visibility and labor in music, a process of organization and realization of a concert was to be designed, that would adhere to the hypothetic notion of *feminist music management*, a concept we aimed to develop and explore. As a start this meant to produce a concert in a way to meet the needs and specificities of female work in music, and to prevent, reduce and mitigate the effects of the current patriarchal character of the music scene in Southeastern Europe as much as possible.

The first goal was to give a clear counter-argumentation to the constant sexist excuse of the negligent music editors, publishers and bookers "there are no women in popular music". In this regard, the selection of the songs for the unique free-to-distribute CD compilation promoting new emerging local musical acts was done through an open call. The selection was done in an anonymous way to prevent the conflict of interest, as well as through a group decision. The group consisted of four female musicians and music editors, with an aim to prevent the autocracy of one person selecting, all too often seen in the conventional, patriarchal led processes. In curating, we made sure to be understanding of the poor quality of the recordings sent as a part of a selection process, and to offer our support if needed, knowing that sometimes, when aiming for quality, the lack of resources and opportunities is the obstacle for the underrepresented groups in every profession. We aimed to also offer feedback to those who saw it as helpful and relevant.

The first, smaller one and less ambitious concert was organized on the 16th April 2022 in the Cultural Center "Parobrod" in Belgrade, Serbia, gathering four female musicians of younger generation alone or with accompaniment, some of them for the first time on stage. The cozy venue designed with *Tiny Desk* in mind (an extremely popular video series of intimate live concerts hosted by American National Public Radio Music at the desk of the presenter and musician Bob Boilen in Washington DC), was full with a little over 100 enthusiastic visitors.

Six weeks later, on the 4th June 2022, we organized another concert in one of the most important and technically best equipped venues in our town, the Youth Center Belgrade. This concert gathered 5 acts in front of 200 people. Those were mostly bands with female

leadership, combining completely unknown names with larger, already established female musicians and bands.

In selecting the acts for the concerts, the team decided to give significant space, resources and platform to the less known and younger female musicians and take that risk. We aimed to establish a safer space with a well-intending circle of colleagues, staff and audience, while developing a connection for them with one of the most well-known and best technically equipped venues in town. We set the tone of the collaboration so that it is okay to make mistakes, to experiment, innovate and be authentic, trying to reduce the pressure for perfection and the burden of gender representation in these female musicians. At the same time, our PR and communications were designed to avoid common stereotyping, sexualization and objectification when promoting female musicians, both in language, narratives and visual images. The organizing team got in touch with the relevant media and the most important music portals to ensure the presence of their journalists at the events, as well as put additional effort into publishing the reviews of the concerts. Some of these musicians performed in front of the audience for the first time at these concerts, and that was an additional reason to provide the greatest support in terms of promotion.

We made sure the musicians, although young and in a nonprofit organizational context, were adequately paid for their work, without the need for them to negotiate or bargain. Finances were transparent, equal and dignified. We also paid attention to whom we are engaging as production staff and made sure that female professionals are engaged for all positions possible. When men were recruited, there was no option for collaborating with colleagues who are known for sexist or violent behavior and those recruited were previously made aware of the values and expectations in terms of treatment of the female musicians. Jancovich (2015) argues that in order for true change to happen and the cultural sector to become truly participatory, a redistribution of funding is required, both to reduce the power of the existing elite and to widen the range of the voices involved. This again supported the idea of the model to invest all the financial means at the disposal to female participants – and associates.

The conversation with the performers was organized in order to communicate the values behind the process and the additional support they can expect from the organizing team. Among those values that we communicated and aimed to practice, were solidarity, mutual support, and avoiding competing and vanity. We discussed the ideas for solving possible problems in terms of their safety, privacy, inadequate audience or colleagues' behavior and made sure they were consulted as performers in different relevant aspects, in order for them to participate in decision making about their concerts.

We offered our knowledge and skills as an additional resource to them in their preparation for the concert and made sure that any expense that was not initially foreseen, but was a possible burden for them being women in the music industry, was covered by the organizers. We talked about making the venue welcoming, safer and adequate. Eventually, we conducted the evaluation to make sure we hear the feedback from the performers, as well as to learn and improve our approach for the next similar occasions.

In all this, it was important to balance the burden of the musicians with the one of the organizers, also being young women in the music industry wearing several hats – working in not ideal conditions and also confronting the patriarchal, sexist and infan-

tilizing treatment from stakeholders in our own work. This was the most difficult part – aiming for high standards in supporting the musicians, while preventing the burnout and the overstress in the members of the management and production staff. This topic is also something to be discussed in the further developing of the conceptual approach to feminist music management.

Lessons Learnt from the Experiment

Based on desk research, as well as according to empirical findings through individual and group interviews, mapping the festivals and music institutions and monitoring the media content and narratives, we advocate for introducing some of the previously described frameworks and tools in order to construct or enhance more sustainable, just, equal and female- and youth-friendly music and cultural scene and industry, through cultural management and policies focused on diversity and equality and based on alternative approaches to leadership.

This approach in cultural management puts emphasis on community and relationships building, rather than profit, which is why it is closer and more possible in the public and nonprofit fields, but also among actors in the private sector which are aiming to position themselves as progressive. It is also based on an approach to leadership (in music management) that reaches beyond traditional notions of leadership, commonly connected to men, hierarchy, authority and strong figures in power. Alternative approaches recognized in female leadership in music stand for pluralism of leadership styles and practices, including intragroup, community and intercultural leadership, leadership "out of necessity", collective, "generous" and transformative leadership (Nenić and Nikolić 2022).

A female-friendly cultural management has an active approach to fighting sexism, prejudice and stereotypes based on gender. Traditionally, cultural institutions and other actors defined their policies as neutral and merit based but actually gender and age equality are only achievable through proactive affirmative action. Those actions, additionally, need to recognize the diversity and pluralism of female and young existences and identities, instead of adopting an essentialist approach that is considering all women, or all young people the same, with the same needs, obstacles and ambitions.

One, but not the only way of conceptualizing the "female" and "young" can be in relation to bodies – in terms of shapes, strengths, sizes, but also of functions, such as growing, menstruating, pregnancy, breastfeeding, and other sexual and reproductive notions. Also, these approaches should take into account safety, privacy and dignity, with an active approach to avoid sexualization and objectification, in general and specifically for young people and women, which are the most exposed. Language should be inclusive and reflect diverse identities while ensuring a relevant and wide spectrum of role models and visibility and the representation of the marginalized social groups in all activities.

Going back to sustainability in cultural management discussed at the beginning of the chapter, sustainable practices care about the existing resources, aiming to make no damage while collecting benefits. Sustainable practices here would mean those that prevent the burnout of musicians and other professionals, those who protect the balance

between work and life – specially having in mind the particularities of female creative work and its re-domestication as described by Barada and Primorac (2018), as well as those who affirm diversity of practices, expressions and identities.

Implications for Cultural Policies

In terms of women's access to leadership roles and career opportunities, research shows that transforming the "culture of bias" requires adequate policies and awareness-raising, both in terms of structures, attitudes and practices. The report by the Hertie School of Governance (2017: 111) shows that it is necessary and effective to support legislative action, but also the development of support structures for self-regulation, and to make alliances among different stakeholders. Some female musicians think that policies, systemic change and encouragement coming from institutions and organizations could gradually improve and compensate for, for example, a lack of self-efficacy they witness in collaboration with other female musicians (Nenić and Nikolić 2022). At the same time, Leila Jancovich and David Stevenson (2021) showed that cultural participation policies can be improved by honesty and critical self-reflection among the decision makers and acknowledging their weak points and failures.

In the case of Serbia, based on the 2017 research results, the Center for Study in Cultural Development advised that, when defining measures of cultural policy, the Ministry of Culture and other decision makers should introduce principles of gender equality in all strategic documents, initiate open calls in order to particularly support female creators and experts, introduce awards entitled to female authors as well as awards for female authors and experts, and support public programs in the field of gender equality (2017: 105).

One opportunity to do so was the Strategy for Cultural Development of the Republic of Serbia, which was adopted by the Government in February 2020, but still in August 2022 at the moment of writing this chapter not ratified by the Assembly. In this document, written for the period from 2020 to 2029, the lack of participation of younger generations in cultural production was connected to the poor working conditions and social security and status of the artists (ivi: 19), especially in smaller towns and outside of big centers (ivi: 23). Children and youth were seen as future beneficiaries of the audience development programs, and it is quoted that 81% of youth feels insufficiently included in cultural production. In the Strategy, this is a part of the argument for stronger cooperation between sectors of arts and education (ivi: 84–85), which is a regular topic in professional circles but without significant improvements for decades now.

Instead of ratifying the Strategy in the National Assembly, the Serbian Government adopted a different document in January 2021. In the 13 pages document on Strategic Priorities in Cultural Development for the period from 2021 to 2025, gender equality in culture is again not mentioned by a single word, while culture for youth and children is the last paragraph of the last, 20th priority in the document.

In February 2021 there was an initiative from the Ministry of Culture to amend the Law on Culture. A group of women's organizations in arts and culture saw this as a window to make cultural legislation in Serbia more gender sensitive, while the national as-

sociation of theaters for children and youth advocated to put more emphasis on children rights to culture, but all suggested changes were ignored.

Unlike Serbia and the countries of Southeastern Europe, the Netherlands and Sweden were successful in reducing gender pay and pension gaps in the cultural sector and, together with France, in improving work-life balance with consideration of flexible and part time work, subsidized child-care and encouraging fathers in familial duties (Hertie School of Governance 2017: 111). The approach, proved effective by this comparative study, encompasses regulations, policy measures, soft measures and a lead role of the public sector, while it is not enough only to monitor but also to sanction non-compliance with the regulations (ibid.)

The German Commission for UNESCO gives a clear itinerary for national cultural policies with even advising compulsory gender trainings for the public sector and other cultural professionals, gender sensitive juries, and legally binding regulations and policies (2020: 4–9). Their list of recommendations includes providing targeted financial support to women as creative entrepreneurs, awarding higher grades for gender balanced project proposals and generally promoting infrastructure that allows for a better work-family-care (ibid.). Additionally, it calls for thorough analysis of the gatekeeping mechanisms, intersectional approach in terms of migration, rurality and other dimensions of marginality, using quotas to change power relationships, supporting empowerment programs just for women, and eventually, "acknowledging and fostering also the notion of artistic expressions as a collective and collaborative effort and not only as the fruit of the 'lone genius'" (ibid.).

This all goes completely in line with the methods used by the FLIM research team in organizing two concerts as part of our experiment described above and could easily serve as a to-do list for Serbian and Southeast European cultural policy decision makers. Music and cultural scenes in the region should be supported into becoming more female- and youth-friendly by intervening in regulations and legislation, providing funds, but also providing knowledge and skills through trainings and different capacity buildings, by consulting and ensuring participation of women and youth in decision making, distributing resources fairly, avoiding and sanctioning behaviors based on sexism and adultism, and acknowledging one's privileges, as well as mistakes. Different stakeholders in the music industry in Serbia and Southeastern Europe have slowly started to be engaged in the fight against gender inequality, but only with the systematic support of the local, national and regional policies will significant changes be seen.

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