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[Equità Di Genere] Gender Rebalancing in and across the Cultural and Creative Sectors: a Decalogue (synthesis)



The cultural publication *AgCult*, with its in-depth monthly feature *Letture Lente*, issued in August 2020 a [call for papers](#) on gender equity in and across the cultural and creative sectors.

The project is also the result of a survey phase carried out by *Economia della Cultura* in issue 4/2019, curated by Flavia Barca and Celestino Spada – [“Discriminazioni di genere nei settori culturali e creativi”](#) (Gender Discrimination in the Cultural and Creative Sectors) - which is rooted in the path opened by the Eenca Report [“Gender gaps in the Cultural and Creative Sectors”](#) and the subsequent [“Brainstorming Report Reflecting Group Discussions During Voices of Culture Session, Prague, 4-5 September 2019”](#).

The main driving force behind the project is a desire to turn the Covid-19 pandemic into an opportunity to question development models that are no longer acceptable. The debate opened by *Letture Lente* begins with a challenge, namely that women can provide a new way of thinking, fresh energy and a new vision of the future.

The call issued by *Letture Lente* has generated a great deal of contributions from a number of sectors, including economy, labor and business, education, health, with an interdisciplinary and inter-generational perspective, creating a multidimensional picture that portrays Culture, in its cross-cutting nature, as a resource against social inequity, for the well-being of individuals and communities alike.

All the observations have been condensed in a [list of possible areas of intervention](#), summarized as follows. The work is underway and will be updated in a second version after the summer of 2021.

1. Creation of a Gender Observatory

Data on gender equality related to the labor market (wage equality, number of women in management positions and so on, with particular attention to precarious employment, which affects women the most) and the analysis of narrative content (a vehicle for stereotyped information, lacking female voices, especially authoritative ones) tend to be poorly recorded, even when they concern the public sector.

This lack of data hinders the full understanding of the phenomenon and the definition of appropriate solutions, through the activation of targeted and effective public policies and the identification of functional indicators to monitor and evaluate them.

2. Reduction of gender gaps in public agencies and private entities

There exists a significant gender gap in our country, which is quite evident if we take into consideration management positions (and career opportunities) and salaries:

In order to spur private entities into paying more attention to gender issues, one possible approach is to condition public funding onto a path of transparency with regard to the gender policies (combined workforce, top positions, salaries, etc.) of applicant organizations.

3. More female professional profiles and more transparency in recruiting

Hiring companies and organizations often complain about a lack of female professionals.

As a response, in recent years, databases made up of female résumés have been multiplying. They are often certified by investment banks, and contain profiles that are suitable for recruitment in top positions: a notable Italian example of this includes the profiles of [100 female experts](#).

The natural complement to a greater accessibility to female CVs is a more transparent recruiting process for high-profile positions.

4. Positive Action

“Positive action”, often implemented as a way of accelerating processes to reduce inequality, is considered by many to be the only way to reverse established stereotypical practices.

For instance, in Sweden, the Ministry of Culture and Democracy favors female candidates over male candidates if their résumés are equivalent.

In Italy, three-year tax exemptions are being introduced for companies that contract female athletes, in order to reduce gaps in professional sports (Legge di Bilancio 2019).

An example of positive action is that of quotas. The Golfo-Mosca law, effective in Italy from 2012 to 2019 (and renewed by decree at the end of 2019, for six terms), defined the gender quota at 40% in boards of directors and committees of auditors of listed companies and publicly controlled companies. The intervention, in Italy,

raised the proportion of women on Boards of Directors from 10% in 2012 and 23% in 2014 to around 35% in 2019.

Finally, an increasingly common practice in many ICC sectors is that of awards dedicated to female professionals. This is a way to encourage the presence of women in normally male-dominated contexts, to promote self-esteem and facilitate female networks.

5. Empowerment strategies

The process of breaking through the so-called "glass ceiling" - the rise of women to the top of institutions - is also slowed down by the stereotypes with which women assess their own abilities, which in turn stems from a patriarchal culture and from the socio-cultural background of the female universe itself.

Stereotypes operate more easily within the gap generated by the lack of "gender-specific" tools and methods of governance. According to some, power per se is antithetical to feminism. However, power is necessary for change to take place.

Indeed, feminism has been debating the need to link empowerment to a path of "centering" and collective change: "we can redefine as entrepreneurial action one that is devoted to a change in society, and that is only made possible by the presence of personal change" (Equi Pierazzini)

Among the tools for growth and awareness, especially worth mentioning are mentoring strategies and strategies aimed at valorizing the stories of exemplary women.

Closely related to the theme of empowerment is that of networking. Women struggle to support each other, to form lobbies and act as a common front, to share experiences, practices and goals.

In recent years, the number of association networks dedicated to exerting pressure on the world of politics and administration so as to positively influence public policies has increased in Italy as well. However, there still is a lack of effective mutual support and co-optation networks. Often, quite simply, women are left out of the hiring process because when it comes to choosing résumés, well-established bonds of knowledge and exchange between males come into play.

6. A new narrative...

Gender prejudice and stereotypes are the result, and at the same time, the generators of a culture of violence (physical, psychological, social) against women, which dates back to the dawn of human history and is still far from being completely eradicated.

This violence is also evident in the cancellation of the achievements of women. It is inherent in the culture and communication that conveys it, where the images that flood our audiovisual diets "mostly keep appealing to a masculine kind of imagery that seeks strong emotions, immediate visual gratification, and escape" (Elisa Manna).

"The most commonly used gender stereotypes in Italy tend to alternate or combine the following recurring elements: women are mostly identified with their bodies; they are irrational and emotional; they focus on their own physical appearance and sexual availability; they tend by nature to take care of others and avoid conflict" (Lorella Zanardo).

And yet, according to Claudia Padovani, public policy interventions are still

lagging behind: "Little has been done in response to the commitments made in Beijing to adopt legal instruments and policies that favor gender equality in and through the media: the [Italian] law that regulates the communication system (no. 112 of May 3, 2004) fails to mention equality issues and gender mainstreaming altogether; nor does the latter appear as one of the objectives to be achieved under the mandate of AGCOM, which has nevertheless produced guidelines on the subject in recent years".

Another crucial factor in the battle against stereotypes is language: "Claiming that *medica* or *ministra* (Italian for female medic, female minister) are incorrect or strident neologisms should be put on the same level as flat earth theories. In fact, *medica* and *ministra* are not neologisms at all. They fit perfectly within the language system, they have the same phonological structure (the same "sound") as words such as *monaca* and *maestra* (female monk, female teacher) which are considered perfectly normal, and not strident in the least" (Giuliana Giusti).

7. ...and a new pedagogical project

The construction of new, non-stereotyped narratives is certainly a crucial point in a hypothetical public gender agenda - one that is functional to empowerment and, from a broader perspective, to the elimination of stereotypes in society, right from the early years of our lives.

Many forms of intervention are possible here. On games and books for children. Through media education in schools. Through mentoring projects and others, particularly in the scientific field, where the gender gap is clear and is reflected in university choices and the world of work.

Moreover, it should not be forgotten that "without a high school diploma, employed females are just 36.3%, compared to 70.7% of their male peers" (Save the Children's Atlas of Childhood at Risk).

8. Countering "toxic masculinity"

From the standpoint of a comprehensive view, it is unthinkable to deal with a narrative change without entering the specifics of the male mindset and the stereotypes which are hindering it.

With the notion of toxic masculinity, Carola Carazzone refers "not only to the violent, foul-mouthed, insulting or denigrating machismo that today is - or should be - criminally sanctioned in any field, but to that whole set of subliminal behaviors and beliefs that include the need for males to suppress emotions, to hide their discomfort and sadness, to maintain an appearance of stoicism, of virility, to avoid behaving in ways that could be deemed as weak, deferential, caring or fearful".

9. A better balance in family roles and between career and private life

For many women, careers are "crushed" upstream because of child care, and downstream because of the need to care for ageing parents. These are functions traditionally attributed to women and which force them to take extended absences from work or, in any case, to give up top positions that are scarcely compatible with the number of daily hours they have to dedicate to their families.

This model is also widespread in the artistic field, often becoming a stigma for women who are forced to miss a number of opportunities because of it.

Many interventions are possible, such as assigning parental leave to men; fostering support interventions to help women reintegrate into the labor market, support

networks and so on.

Again, the issue here is not just equality, but also a vision of welfare: this is one of those cases in which the battle for "equal opportunities" becomes an instrument of innovation for the whole society, one that is more attentive to collective needs, to balance, to the quality of life, to well-being in general.

10. Rethinking the algorithm

The last but decisive issue is that of rethinking all the information management systems upstream.

Data on health, education, public policies... All the systems that regulate the indexing of information (and the consequent policies) are, for the most part, calibrated on the male population, and this is having dangerous effects in terms of accelerating gender stereotypes. What is more, these will be increasingly disruptive over time.

"Italy will never be sustainable until it addresses and reduces gender, generational and territorial inequalities, which are the main factors of social exclusion in our country. [...] Three cross-cutting priorities: women, young people and the South. The greatest long-term inequalities and the greatest investment needs are concentrated on them". This is the key consideration of the Piano Nazionale di Ripresa e Resilienza (National Recovery and Resilience Plan): the equality issue affects it horizontally, opening up opportunities for intervention that must be seized and consolidated as a matter of urgency.

In this direction, reflecting on the convergence between the transformative thinking of culture and the transformative thinking of women, on social inclusion and on the construction of a new narrative opens up a perspective of possible interventions and measures of significant social and economic impact.

Letture Lente will continue to work on these issues in the coming months with a specific focus on intervention measures. The call is open.

Fonti

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