

## ***Underrepresented but of high quality: German and European feature films by female directors***

***by Elizabeth Prommer & Skadi Loist***

It has been frequently reported that female and male careers in the media develop differently. Executive positions are still dominated by men. This is also true for creative professions in audiovisual media and especially in film production. In the USA; women only make up less than 10 percent in the so-called above-the-line positions in film. Above-the-line positions include those professionals in film production that get mentioned in the opening credits, i.e. producers, directors, script authors and directors of photography. Below-the-line positions are often filled by female assistants, e.g. in continuity, directing and casting in film and television. The picture is the same in Germany: Although nearly half of film school alumni are women, they are significantly underrepresented in directing film and TV. Only every fifth feature film is directed by a woman and women only receive 10 percent of the federal film funds.

One of the key arguments in film production, as voiced for instance by the Head of Public Broadcast Station MDR, Carola Wille, is that production decisions, e.g. who directs, are only made with regard to “quality”. This somehow implies that women cannot deliver the same “quality” of films that men can. This paper will take a closer look at this argument and discuss similarities and differences between films directed by men and films directed by women.

Based on publicly accessible data from the annual reports of the German Federal Film Board (Filmförderungsanstalt – FFA), we calculated how many films have been realized by women in the last five years. We looked at the differences between female- and male-directed films in terms of financing, funding, box office, awards as well as festival run.

The results: only every fifth German feature film (22 % of 627 films altogether), which premiered in the years 2009-2013, has been directed by a woman. At the same time, films by women apparently impress with their high standard of aesthetic quality: women-directed films more often win awards and have a more successful festival run. A film by a women often screens at three to five festivals, sometimes up to ten festivals and their festival run is more international and divers. This success is remarkable considering – in addition to the underrepresentation of women in film production – their films usually have to be realized with smaller budgets (on average 660.000 EUR compared to 1.000.000 EUR for men) and get far less funding (65% of the funding that films with a male director received).

Since this study is part of a wider Pan-European study, we will compare the results for Germany with the available data of six further European national film industries. The results of the study in brief: women are significantly underrepresented in German and European film production as less than every fifth film was directed by a woman, they receive less film funding and work with smaller budgets. However, women-directed films obviously have a greater aesthetic quality appreciated by critics and jurors. Therefore, lacking “quality” can definitely not be the reason for the gender-imbalance. The paper will discuss this in more depth.

Keywords: film production, gender inequality, film directors, film festival

Prof. Dr. Elizabeth Prommer; professor and chair for communication and media studies, director of the Institute for Media Research at the University of Rostock, Germany. Contact: [elizabeth.prommer@uni-rostock.de](mailto:elizabeth.prommer@uni-rostock.de); +49 381 498-2718, Universität Rostock, August-Bebel-Str. 28, 18055 Rostock.

Dr. Skadi Loist, researcher and lecturer at the Institute for Media Research at the University of Rostock, Germany. Contact: [skadi.loist@uni-rostock.de](mailto:skadi.loist@uni-rostock.de); +49 381 498-2718, Universität Rostock, August-Bebel-Str. 28, 18055 Rostock.