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Women in public cultural organizations and their professional paths strategies: A rhizomatic approach

Anna Góral 

Faculty of Management and Social Communication, Jagiellonian University, Kraków, Poland

Correspondence

Anna Góral, Faculty of Management and Social Communication, Jagiellonian University, Kraków, Poland.

Email: anna.goral@uj.edu.pl

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Abstract

The aim of this article is to explore the rhizomatic nature of the professional development strategies used by the female workforce of public cultural organizations. The research problem of this study are (1) the challenges of women who work in public cultural organizations and (2) ways of dealing with them by women. The empirical material was collected between January 2021 and January 2022 through 20 in-depth interviews with female managers of public cultural organizations in Poland. The findings are presented in three sections: (1) specificity of work in culture, (2) twists and configurations on the way to grow, and (3) communities. In this way, it was possible to capture the specific strategies used by the female workforce for the development of their professional paths. To illustrate the complexity of these strategies, the concept of *Rhizome*—a root structure that grows in unpredictable and manifold directions—developed by Deleuze and Guattari was used. It also highlighted the fact that the professional development strategies used by women develop in a strong relationship with their environment and constantly evolve according to the needs of the women who decide to undertake them. The results of the research illustrate the impact of the far-reaching gendered nature of work in cultural organizations on the

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professional development of women in this sector. Moreover, this reveals that to achieve their professional ambitions, women in cultural organizations co-create complex informal organizational constructs, rhizome-like in structure, which help women cope with the challenges that arise along their professional paths. These findings contribute to the theory of gendered organizations and the knowledge of gender inequality in cultural organizations.

KEYWORDS

gender inequality in cultural organizations, gendered organization, invisible work, rhizomatic strategies

1 | INTRODUCTION

Public cultural organizations are complex workplaces. On the one hand, they are perceived as traditional, stiff, boring, and, by some, even unnecessary organizations. On the other hand, people perceive them as progressive, inspiring, and extremely important from the viewpoint of broadly understood social development (Balwin & Ackerson, 2017). Furthermore, cultural organizations are some of the most feminized organizations in the typical structure of an economy (UNESCO, 2017). By cultural organizations in this research are meant those organizations that deal with both the production of cultural goods and its dissemination. This includes various forms of organization, for example, theater, cinema, film organization, museum, library, opera, operetta, philharmonic, orchestra, cultural center, artistic center, art gallery, research and documentation center (Markusen & Schrock, 2006). These can be private or public organizations, but also associations and foundations, as well as informal groups. However, this research focuses on public cultural organizations, that is, cultural organizations that are publicly funded.

On one hand, researchers indicate that this situation results from the conviction that the cultural sector and in particular public cultural organizations are considered “safe and peaceful” jobs, primarily due to the stability of employment, which is treated as the main subject of women's interest (Mc Tavish & Miller, 2009; UNESCO, 2017). On the other hand, cultural organizations are widely perceived as a workplace characterized by a large degree of freedom of action, creativity, greater democratization of management processes, and willingness to experiment (Banks et al., 2013; Banks & Milestone, 2011), which encourages the involvement of marginalized groups in the labor market, including women (UNESCO, 2017). However, studies (e.g., Banks & Milestone, 2011; Dodd, 2012) show that this does not mean professional development in the sector is easier for women. Research conducted in 2021 in Polish public cultural organizations reveals a significant disparity in terms of accessibility of the most senior managerial positions to women as executive managerial positions in public cultural organizations are far more often occupied by men (Góral, 2021).

Nevertheless, much remains to be discovered in studies on public cultural organizations and women, as despite the sector's strong feminization, such studies are scarce. These are mostly quantitative studies that seek to map the phenomenon's scale (Anheier, 2009; Dodd, 2012; Góral, 2021; Hesmondhalgh & Baker, 2015). Moreover, most research on women in creative industries, which includes public cultural organizations, focuses primarily on business organizations such as media or advertising (Banks & Milestone, 2011; Dodd, 2012; Martin et al., 2020; Swanson & Wise, 2000). However, with notable exceptions (e.g., Balwin & Ackerson, 2017), scholars have said little so far about the direct perspective of those working in public organizations in the sector. This research gap motivates the selection of this subject for analysis.

Furthermore, there is a significant research gap related to research in Eastern Europe. Noteworthy, the situation of women managers in Central and Eastern European countries—previously functioning in the socialist system for over 40 years—is relatively poorly researched compared to other countries, especially in Western Europe and the USA (UNIFEM, 2020). Although the ideology and policy of the socialist period significantly influenced the labor markets and existing organizations' transformation, including in favor of professional activation of women, gender differences largely affected social hierarchy (Fidelis, 2010). The period of transformation that started in 1989 did not strengthen the ongoing emancipation of women in Poland, and as some studies show, it was even slower than in other democratic countries (Elliott et al., 2016; Sekuła-Kwaśniewicz, 2015). The most recent studies (incl. Lukic et al., 2006; Matysiak, 2015; Bogacz-Wojtanowska & Wrona, 2017) show that a growing number of women face continuous stereotyping and marginalization, especially in social organizations. Therefore, studying the situation of women in cultural organizations can allow a deeper understanding of the contemporary situation of women in Polish organizations and different contexts of women's roles in organizations in various political, sociocultural, and economic situations.

This article explores the rhizomatic nature of the professional development strategies used by the female workforce of public cultural organizations. The research problem of this study are (1) the challenges of women who work in public cultural organizations and (2) ways of dealing with them by women. The empirical material was collected between January 2021 and January 2022 through 20 in-depth interviews with female managers of public cultural organizations in Poland. The study provided rich empirical material documenting the impact of the far-reaching gendered nature of work in public cultural institutions, which influences the professional development of women in these workplaces. Additionally, the study showed how women deal with the challenges that arise along with their professional development in the sector. Also, the geographical location of the study—Poland—provides the literature with a novel perspective.

The findings broadened knowledge about both gender inequality in cultural industries and the theory of gendered organizations. To illustrate the complexity of professional development strategies taken by women working in public cultural organizations, the concept of "Rhizome," a root structure that grows in unpredictable and manifold directions, developed by Deleuze and Guattari (1987) was used. It helped conceptualize and better understand the nature of strategies undertaken by women during their professional paths as a response to various challenges that appeared. It underlined that those strategies develop in a strong relationship with their environment and constantly evolve according to the needs of women who decide to follow them. Therefore, recognizing the rhizome as an organizational symbol or interpretive scheme can serve as a valuable and, indeed, necessary means of broadening the narration of the everyday organizational experience of women.

The remainder of this article is structured as follows. Section 2 presents the theoretical background and a review of the literature. Section 3 describes the research method. Section 4 presents the findings. Section 5 discusses the results. Section 6 concludes the article.

2 | THEORETICAL BACKGROUND AND LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 | Women and cultural organizations

The theoretical framework for this study was gender organization theory (J. Acker, 1990, 2006; S. Acker, 1994). J. Acker (1990) defines a gendered organization as one in which "advantage and disadvantage, exploitation and control, action and emotion, meaning and identity, are patterned through and in terms of a distinction between male and female, masculine and feminine" (p. 146). By adopting this perspective, we may define gender in terms of social roles and the place it occupies in the constitution of social life (Holmes & Marra, 2011; Wharton, 2006), which in the practice of organizational life is reflected in the shape of organizational culture, structures, division of labor, definition of power relations, or organization's physical space layout (Bailyn, 2003; Clavero &

Galligan, 2021; Goode & Bagilhole, 1998). Consequently, these aspects affect how participants in organizational life define themselves in the organizational context in which they function, both in formal and informal situations (Gherardi, 1996).

The nature of a cultural organization is inherently gendered as it does not operate in a void but is part and parcel of patriarchal social structures. The research by UNESCO (2017) shows that in 58% of countries with available data, there are more women with cultural compared to non-cultural occupations. Moreover, for 69% of countries with available data, there were more self-employed women working in the culture sector than in non-culture sectors in 2015 (UNESCO, 2017). However, the typical head of a public cultural organization is assumed to be a white man with little responsibility for care work outside of his career (Sudot, 2020; Szreder, 2016). Despite the common belief that the culture sector is “women friendly”, Dodd (2012) notes that the working models considered friendly remain problematic for women, especially in the context of professional development needs and opportunities in this sector. The projectification of work in culture and the unregulated working time—often associated with the need to work in afternoons and on weekends—may give a lot of freedom of action, but they can also be a significant obstacle to professional development (Banks, Gill, & Taylor, 2013; Klenke, 2017). This is especially the case when it is necessary to reconcile professional and non-professional (including family) duties, which is mainly the women's domain (Martin et al., 2020).

However, the fact that cultural organizations exist in longstanding patriarchal social structures does not preclude their constant transformation. Public cultural organizations constantly change and respond to external economic, social, political, and demographical pressures, including those related to the promotion of diversity. However, as indicated by Simon (2012), these primarily manifest in relation to the external environment of these organizations, especially to the audience: opening to increasingly diverse recipient groups and their needs, expanding the diversity of exhibited works, and developing broad cooperation (Kemp & Poole, 2016; Simon, 2010; Wiggins, 2004). Meanwhile, questions about gender equality and inclusion related to staff remain largely unanswered (Balwin & Ackerson, 2017; Simon, 2012). As stated by Balwin and Ackerson (2017), besides the low representation of women in managerial positions in public cultural organizations, this lack of answers results in the lower presence of women in science museums, fewer women artists represented in museum collections, and the weak presentation of women's lives in history museums or their complete absence. After analyzing the new media sector in the creative industry, Banks and Milestone (2011) highlighted that existing management models often exhibit a clear continuity with the “old” economy in terms of enduring gender inequality and discrimination. Moreover, the authors point to the growing precarization of work conditions in cultural organizations: jobs are low-paying, economically unstable, and highly competitive (Gruber, 2019), which further reinforces the increasing projectification of work in culture (Rauning & Ray, 2009) and the uncertainty about the future worsened by the COVID-19 pandemic (Crescentino et al., 2021). Furthermore, cultural organizations are perceived as inessential to generating significant personal or community wealth and value (Simon, 2012). Nevertheless, people perceive work in leadership positions as prestigious, especially in large national cultural organizations, because it allows one to influence society through art and culture (Balwin & Ackerson, 2017). As a result, despite the growing number of women working in public cultural organizations, systemic gender discrimination remains deeply entrenched in public cultural organizations around the world (Balwin & Ackerson, 2017). Banks and Milestone (2011) show how the discourse of “flexibility” and “creative freedom” allowed the creative sector to mask some fundamental inequalities and discriminatory practices in cultural work. Moreover, Adkins (1999) demonstrates how women in cultural work tend to be allocated administrative, caring, or support occupations, rather than cutting-edge and creative reflexive roles, which is a consequence of a “thoroughgoing institutionalization of individualization which is dependent on a traditional family division of labor” (Adkins, 1999). Based on this evidence, we may argue that the organization of ostensibly “detraditionalized” and “reflexive” cultural industry work enhances the possibility of the reapplication of some “traditional” forms of gender discrimination and inequality. Consequently, women who want to develop professionally in public cultural organizations need to overcome numerous challenges.

2.2 | Rhizome and the study of organization

Using symbols and metaphors to understand organizational reality has a relatively long tradition in organizational science (Czarniawska, 1997; Gagliardi, 1990; Kostera & Kociatkiewicz, 2015; Stablein & Nord, 1985; Turner, 1986). One of the still underdeveloped concepts in this field that has greatly influenced the development of new thinking in the realms of social, cultural, and literary theory is Deleuzian philosophy, which proposes several new metaphors for understanding reality (Boje, 1995; Bougen & Young, 2000; Cooper, 1986; Lawley, 2005). Some examples of its use appear in works by Bougen and Young (2000), Deroy and Clegg (2011), and Painter-Morland and Deslandes (2014) who reach for Deleuzian philosophy to propose a rethink of gender in leadership studies. Gleadle (2013) used the rhizome metaphor to discuss feminist history since 2001.

The Deleuzian concept of a rhizome seems particularly interesting for the development of organization theory. In the work of Deleuze and Guattari (1987), rhizome is the philosophical counterpart of the botanical term. A rhizome is a plant that pops out of the ground over an expanding area, giving the impression that many separate plants are emerging in close proximity to one another, but in fact, these ostensibly individual “plants” are parts of one big plant, and are interconnected by stems that grow horizontally under or along the ground. They spread with no direction, no beginning and no end (Esepedal, 2021). Some of those rhizomes will age, but others will produce new offshoots that “cut across older connections, sometimes retracting former links or making unexpected points of contact to produce a dynamic, heterogeneous and ever-shifting organism” (Gleadle, 2013, p. 525). Rhizomes are composed of multiplicity of plateaus, meaning groups of intense connections that sustain a creative energy of their own.

Deleuze and Guattari (1987) thought of the rhizome in terms of six principles: connection, heterogeneity, multiplicity, a-signifying rupture, cartography, and decalomania. The first principle that they used in their seminal work “A Thousand Plateaus” to describe the rhizome was the principle of the connection. With this, they tried to illustrate the rhizome as a network of connections with various resources needed to growth, and those can be defined as people, ideas, and other assets used. This principle they linked with the second: heterogeneity, which means, according to Deleuze and Guattari (1987), that “any point of a rhizome can be connected to any other and must be”. This is different from the tree or root, which plots a point and fixes an order. Heterogeneity means that in the rhizome the connections of orders are not based on already known structures and hierarchies, but on new ones, that suit best the rhizome at a time (Lawley, 2005). The third principle of the rhizome was named multiplicity, which can be defined as an entity that originates from a folding or twisting of simple elements: “Like a sand dune, a multiplicity is in constant flux, though it attains some consistency for a short or long duration. A multiplicity has porous boundaries and is defined provisionally by its variations and dimensions” (Tampio, 2010). In this way, philosophers tried to encourage more open thinking, directed to noticing nuances, that have an impact on how the rhizome grows. A multiplicity is a complex structure that does not refer to any of previously defined, traditional rules and principles (Mackness et al., 2016). The fourth principle of rhizome was defined as a-signifying rupture. It states that a rhizome can never be broken. Deleuze and Guattari meant by this that if one of the rhizome parts is interrupted, it will not die but will continue in a different path, or it will change its function (Michon, 2021). The fifth principle of rhizomatic theory was cartography, explained as opposed to sixth principle of decalomania. Deleuze and Guattari (1987) used both concepts together to explain their idea that a rhizome is not amenable to any structural or generative model. As they underline, it is a “map and not a tracing”. The rhizomatic map is open and connectable in all its dimensions. It can be adapted to any kind of need, re-worked by an individual, group, or social formation (Michon, 2021). The map is drawn each time, meaning that it cannot be repeated, as each who follows the path does it differently, adjusting to his or her needs.

As Pick (2016) states, the rhizome metaphor suggests that organization is something nonlinear in which everything is connected to everything else. “These connections are not disorganized in that various planes of multiplicity exist, but they are also not organized in that there is a constant flow and flux of new connections that appear among multiplicities” (Pick, 2016, p. 805). The rhizome is distributed, has no center, and shows multiple dimensions and directions. As stressed by Deleuze and Guattari (1987, p. 21), “there is no beginning, no end, only a middle that grows.” The rhizome is nomadic, in which the process is as important as the outcome (Braidotti, 2012). The

rhizome seems to open possibilities for challenging taken-for-granted assumptions in organizations. Therefore, the rhizome can appear in studies of complexity and change how urban cultures are organized (Daskalaki & Mould, 2013; Gandy, 2005). The rhizome metaphor has also been used to describe fast-growing concepts or communities, such as the Internet, where the mechanism of growth is hidden (Buchanan, 2007). However, there are few scholarly works that employ the rhizome metaphor to describe organizational life and its participants (cf. Gomes De Oliveira Zioli et al., 2021; Lawley, 2004; Linstead & Thanem, 2007; Sørensen, 2004).

As underlined by Deleuze and Guattari (1987), the organization is everywhere, folded into and folding out of the form and content of rhizomatic connections—of life itself. As such, the challenge involves finding ways to apply the rhizome to improve our understanding and representation of the complex modern world of organizations (De Cock, 2009). Using Deleuze and Guattari's propositions seems particularly interesting in the context of attempts to understand organizations that elude common patterns.

However, while using metaphors in any research, it is important to be aware of the imitations of their use. Morgan (1997) in his study on metaphors underlines that “in creating ways of seeing they tend to create ways of not seeing” (p. 348). Lakoff and Johnson (2008) point out that metaphors shape the way we see and the way we act, they enact a particular view and can be “self-fulfilling prophecies” (p. 132). Also as underlined by Elizabeth St. Pierre (2004), who studied work of Deleuze, it is possible to over-think what Deleuze might mean. She suggests that the researchers should “give up worrying about what Deleuze might have intended and use him in their own work ‘to free life from where it's trapped, to trace lines of flight’ (Deleuze, 1990, p. 141) into a different way of being in the world” (p. 284). As proposed by Mackness et al. (2016) while following the work of Deleuze and Guattari, it can be noticed that they were more interested in the conceptual changes that could result from rhizomatic thinking and encourage people to think outside the box, rather than literary metaphor. Similar assumptions were made during this investigation. Applying the rhizome-based understanding allowed to look at the women's career development from different angle—instead of once again analyzing the barriers and obstacles that women encounter along their professional paths, this research focused on specific professional development strategies that are being build and then implemented by women as a respond to the challenges they face. In this way, it was possible to apply a different perspective that is currently dominant in research on women's career advancement, which means mainly barriers and obstacles they face and the consequences of discrimination in the workplace (Klenke, 2017; Murrell & James, 2001; Perez, 2019).

Moreover, for the purpose of this paper, the rhizome was used more as a conceptual metaphor (about thinking and reasoning), and as such all further references to metaphor in this paper will be understood. Such use of the rhizome metaphor helped to illustrate the routes that women's professional paths have taken during their career development. Importantly, it also allowed one to catch various twists and configurations that appear in women's professional paths and see the ways they react and grow in response to those, often unexpected, influences. Nevertheless, the proposed approach allowed to introduce alternative metaphors into organizational theory and to enrich the gendered organizations theory (Alvesson & Sandberg, 2013) by drawing attention to the complexity of women's organizational lives.

3 | RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 | Sample

To provide a purposive sample, 20 women were invited to the study. They were all managers with at least medium-level managerial positions at Polish public cultural organizations, which allowed to provide rich narratives within a specific context through shared sectoral characteristics (Krueger et al., 2000). This research strategy allowed to learn in detail the experiences of women who reached at least medium-level managerial positions in their professional careers in the culture sector and to partly explain the observed phenomena as they are seen by people from the system (Welman &

TABLE 1 Research participants' characteristics.

	Name of the respondent	Type of cultural institution in which she is currently working	Years in the sector	Role of the institution	Additional information
1	Maria	Museum	20	Deputy Director	1 child in preschool age; husband/partner; additionally associated with NGOs; artist
2	Anna	Theater	10	Department Manager	2 children in school and preschool age; husband/partner
3	Marta	Cultural center	17	Director	1 child in school age; husband/partner
4	Aleksandra	Museum	15	Department Manager	3 children in school and preschool age; husband/partner
5	Ilona	Museum	8	Department Manager	1 child in preschool age; husband/partner; associated with NGOs
6	Kamila	Theater	12	Deputy Director	2 children in school and preschool age; husband/partner
7	Monika	Cultural center	6	Department Manager	1 child in preschool age; husband/partner; associated with NGOs
8	Magda	Museum	5	Department Manager	1 child in nursery; husband/partner; artist
9	Agnieszka	Cultural center	9	Deputy Director	1 child in school age; husband/partner; artist
10	Iwona	Museum	13	Department Manager	2 children in school and preschool age; husband/partner
11	Sabina	Museum	17	Senior Specialist	2 children of school and preschool age; husband/partner; associated with NGOs; Ph.D. candidate
12	Aldona	Cultural center	10	Director	1 child in school age; husband/partner
13	Fiona	Museum	15	Deputy Director	3 children in school and preschool age; husband/partner
14	Malwina	Cultural center	12	Festival Director/ Department Manager	Husband/partner; associated with NGOs
15	Mila	Cultural center	13	Department Manager	Husband/partner
16	Karo	Museum	10	Department Manager	Single/no family obligations
17	Sara	Cultural center	20	Department Manager	2 children; husband/partner
18	Dana	Museum	15	Department Manager	Husband/partner
19	Ola	Museum	18	Department Manager	Single/no family obligations; PhD student
20	Nora	Theater	15	Director	2 children in school age; husband/partner

Source: own elaboration.

Kruger, 1999; Wilhoit & Kisselburgh, 2016). A characteristic shared by all the study participants was the assumption that all the organizations they work for are characterized by above-average activity in the field of culture, understood among other things, by the number of implemented cultural projects. The respondents worked in various cities in Poland and in different cultural organizations. The details of the respondents are presented in Table 1. The column "additional information" presents what the respondents found important when completing the metric data during the interview. Importantly, all of them emphasized their family situation, which is also an element that largely influences their professional activity at work and determines their identity (Gherardi, 1996). It is significant that the researcher did not evoke information about family status in any way, but the respondents felt it was relevant to understanding the course of their career, and they volunteered to provide this information while describing their current state of life.

3.2 | Data collection

Data were collected and recorded using qualitative methods through 20 semi-structured in-depth interviews, which took the form of biographical interviews focused on the life stories of the respondents. Therefore, it was possible to capture the whole picture of the analyzed phenomenon, to see the full trajectories of the professional paths of women, to understand the nature of the twists and configurations that appeared over time, and to see how and why respondents reacted to them. According to Bentz and Shapiro (1998), actual cognition and understanding of participants' experiences of a phenomenon mean capturing rich descriptions of phenomena and their settings. Therefore, the interviews encouraged reflection and focused on how the respondents experienced working in cultural organizations, what their professional paths were like, and what importance and value they applied to these organizations. The questions were "directed to the participants' experiences, feelings, beliefs, and convictions about the theme in question" (Welman & Kruger, 1999, p. 196). The interviews were recorded with the consent of the respondents and later transcribed. Data from research participants were anonymized. Research was carried out from January 2021 to January 2022. Each of the interviews lasted for 60 min on average.

3.3 | Analysis and discussion

A series of "life story" narratives were collected (Cohen & Musson, 2000) from 20 women who held managerial positions in public cultural organizations to consider their motivations, perceptions, and developments at different stages of their lives. All participants were asked to consider how they achieved what they felt to be key activities and their careers' progress looked like. In this way, individuals used "interpretive repertoires when articulating their experiences" (Gill & Larson, 2014, p. 530).

All data obtained from the interviews were coded and analyzed using NVivo software. Coding was performed on three levels: open, axial, and selective (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). First, initial open codes were created based on textual field data. Subsequently, axial coding was adopted to identify and integrate the relationships between codes and to create broader categories. Finally, selective coding was used to define and develop broader clusters of codes and to present a broader story.

The analysis was carried out in two stages. During the first stage of the analysis, the material was studied in a way to highlight moments in which participants defined themselves and articulated related goals, confusions, or tensions, which were collected as themes comparable to previous research on what it means to be a woman and work in a public cultural organization, what it means to be a woman manager, and how to navigate your career at workplaces. This narrative highlighted the intricate paths women took toward career advancement and their often nonlinear character.

Then, during the second stage of the analysis, the focus was on extracting the professional development strategies used by women during their professional paths. It was done through the lens of the Deleuze and Guattari's *Rhizome*, thus using this metaphor to understand the investigated organizational reality. Table 2 suggests how six Rhizome principles, as understood by Deleuze and Guattari, were translated into principles used to understand the character of strategies used by the female workforce during their professional lives. In Table 2, each principle of the rhizome as proposed by Deleuze and Guattari was described separately with a quote from their book "A Thousand Plateaus". Then, those principles grouped in pairs were adapted into characteristics of the professional development strategies used by women and described as such. When presented in pairs, it was easier to understand the concept, as those principles interfere and complement each other and together present the broad picture of the phenomenon studied.

TABLE 2 Relevance of *Rhizome* to professional development strategies used by women.

The Rhizome	Definition of principles according to “A Thousand Plateaus” by Deleuze and Guattari (1987)	Principles used to understand the character of professional development strategies used by the female workforce
1. Principle of connection	“...any point of a rhizome can be connected to any other, and must be”	The professional development path has no beginning and no end and can be entered at any point. The development is encouraged by ceaseless connections with people, ideas and resources used.
2. Principle of heterogeneity	“There is no ideal speaker - listener, there is [no] homogeneous linguistic community”	
3. Principle of multiplicity	“A multiplicity has neither subject nor object, only determinations, magnitudes, and dimensions that cannot increase in number without the multiplicity changing in nature.”	Career development can be a-centered and a-hierarchical. It allows to break away groups or individuals to reorganize in a direction of their choice at any point and then again, encourages to join new groups and individuals...
4. Principle of asignifying rupture	“...There is a rupture in the rhizome whenever segmentary lines explode into a line of flight, but the line of flight is part of the rhizome. These lines always tie back to one another.”	
5. Principle of cartography	“...a map that is always modifiable and has multiple entryways and exists and its own lines of fight”	People create and follow self-selected, individual pathways, and embrace uncertainty.
6. Principle of decalomania	“...forming through continuous negotiation with its context, constantly adapting by experimentation, thus performing a non-symmetrical active resistance against rigid organization and restriction.”	

Source: Deleuze and Guattari (1987) and Mackness et al. (2016).

4 | FINDINGS

In this part of the text, the explored life stories of women who took part in this research will be presented. The basis of the result presentation was formed by the aspects directly corresponding with the research questions, which on this level of data analysis allowed to capture the complexity of women's professional paths, their personal experiences, the challenges they encounter on their way, and ways they use to deal with them. Thus, the findings are presented according to the following scheme:

- specificity of work in culture,
- twists and configurations on the way to grow,
- communities.

The first two sections relate to the first of the research questions (the challenges of women who work in public cultural organizations) and the third section is related to the second research question (ways of dealing with the challenges at work in public cultural organizations by women). In this way, it was also possible to capture the rhizomatic character of the strategies used by the female workforce during the development of their professional paths, which will be discussed in the next section of this paper.

4.1 | Specificity of work in culture

All research participants were affiliated with public cultural organizations since the beginning of their careers. Some of them were also working for NGOs active in the cultural sector. All joined the cultural sector during university education or shortly after graduation. Their motivation to work in the sector was usually related to their personal interest in art. The respondents consciously decided to work in the cultural sector. From the very beginning, culture played an important role in their lives, and so, they wanted to associate their future with it:

Ever since I can remember I have wanted to work in culture. Why? Because I love art, creativity... I wanted to be connected to this milieu, I saw it as a chance for self-development. Perhaps not only professional but also personal (Marta).

They perceived entering a cultural organization as a dream come true, meaning not only a dream professional path but also preferred lifestyle, which made them accept from the beginning the fact that culture and work strongly intertwine with other spheres of their private and family life. Many of my respondents aspired to spend as much time as possible "in culture": "In order to explain to you the intricacies of my work and career path, I would probably have to draw you a map. It is not so easy to grasp this reality" (Malwina).

Recalling the beginnings of their professional paths, the respondents emphasized they liked work organization in culture, by which they mean flexible working hours connected with schedules of the projects in which they were involved, the possibility of working "in the field," including travel, working on weekends, and above all, working with people, mainly artists. In their opinion, it somehow reflected the "spirit of culture," which they identified with freedom:

I got involved with the exhibitions department straight away. What I liked about it was that sometimes we sat for long hours discussing new projects, meeting artists, curators, organizing openings.... I didn't really pay attention to my working hours because it didn't matter, the work absorbed me (Magda).

If you work in a community center it often means working in afternoons and evenings, these are the needs of our audiences, and we had to adapt to it. It was something I took for granted, something I never really thought about, and I always liked it (Agnieszka).

4.2 | Twists and configurations on the way to grow

However, working in cultural organizations is not only about engaging in the process of creating and enjoying art. After some time, the allure of a diverse and flexible work environment often turned out to be a trap, as some superiors quickly exploited the respondents' willingness to work flexible hours, weekends, and travel, thus making my respondents always stay at work. Besides substantive duties related to the implementation of artistic projects, work in cultural organizations involves administrative and technical duties: "The curator, the manager, the technical staff member—they are one and the same person" (Agnieszka).

Respondents felt that additional duties indirectly related to their scope of responsibilities weighed heavily on them and distracted them from actual work. Anna, Ilona, and Monika emphasized that they were often expected to perform additional, informal duties, strongly related to gender roles. For example, they were expected to provide emotional support to new employees and those in difficult situations, accompany guests, serve coffee, or prepare rooms for meetings and gatherings organized by superiors. According to the respondents, these duties often distracted them from substantive work and prevented full engagement, which in retrospect, they perceived as an obstacle to professional development. However, these duties were somehow "inscribed" in the nature of work in culture and were treated as obvious. The burden of these additional tasks was particularly heavy when the respondents had to

increasingly balance their professional with nonprofessional work, namely family and private life. Nevertheless, they felt they could not refuse additional involvement, hoping it would positively influence their professional position in the future and appreciation from superiors. However, their additional activities ultimately did not have an impact on their professional development, only on the friendly attitude of their superiors and their willingness to further engage research participants in work. Therefore, respondents perceived the situation as part of their job in a cultural organization, which was to have a deeper meaning and value for the general public, thus imbuing their activities with a mission.

The respondents described professional development as difficult and often incomprehensible, especially progression to management positions. Karo emphasized in her story that it was only the third time that she managed to receive a promotion to a managerial position in the museum, despite her belief that in previous attempts she had been the optimal candidate for this position:

It was only in the third attempt that I became Department Head. The first two times someone else was always chosen – a man – although I am not sure whether it mattered. I was always the better substantive candidate: I had knowledge, experience ... but other arguments won, such as longer or closer acquaintance with the director. It was only when they failed that the director became convinced of me and chose me: the person with the best knowledge and experience (Karo).

Other respondents reported similar experiences. Frequently, their conviction that additional involvement in administrative work would be an asset turned out to be illusory. However, full availability and presence in the right circles of the organization's decision-makers and artists were often key, which was difficult for the respondents, given the expectation of their involvement in additional, non-substantial work at the organization or daily non-work-related duties. Moreover, knowledge about possible promotion opportunities was equally important, and this knowledge was often restricted to directors' inner circles of acquaintances and did not reach other employees.

Similarly, Sabina described issues related to opportunities for raising competencies and expanding expertise, which are essential when thinking about professional development. Despite her superior's declarations about support for the employee development, it was difficult:

[If you're not in the right circles] you have limited access to information because you do not participate in various meetings, gatherings, etc., so it made it a bit difficult, even very difficult if you consider what I do, and at my work nobody really understood that, in my position, access to information translates exactly into effectiveness, so in general, at some point, it started to be a problem, which resulted in more and more routine, less and less development, which also made work increasingly difficult (Sabina).

On the other hand, Iwona underlined those opportunities for raising qualifications at her workplace were supposedly universal, while in practice, only the select few whom the director arbitrarily considered promising could raise their qualifications, thus limiting development possibilities for the rest. The limited and often discretionary access to development opportunities and unclear promotion criteria often demotivated the respondents: "If you won't discover what you can do in the first few years and start pursuing it later, then you don't really care anymore and you start looking for another job" (Sabina).

4.3 | Communities

As Maria points out, working in cultural organizations "means working with "creative matter". It requires creativity in many fields and on many levels. This concerns not just designing specific activities in the sense of their "content" but also in the organizational sense". Over time, creativity and flexibility emerged more clearly in the respondent's stories,

especially in relation to how they dealt with workplace reality. Respondents began to indicate that the described challenges applied not only to them but also to their female colleagues, who dealt with them by means of mutual support. The respondents quickly, as if naturally, became part of self-help circles present in cultural organizations, which support women's daily work and professional development:

I've quickly noticed that there were people – probably mainly women – helping each other a lot. You could feel the support was strong, although not regulated in any way and also not widely announced. If someone was in need, there was always someone willing to help. I quickly became a part of this circle. At first, I was the one helping, but there was also a time when I was the one in need (Marta).

In their statements, the respondents emphasized the role of various informal arrangements operating in their workplaces that facilitated their professional development and were especially helpful in balancing their professional and nonprofessional lives. All respondents emphasized the role of mutual support in the workplace as an important factor that influences how they function in the cultural sector and their professional development opportunities:

I remember when I had to unexpectedly pick up my daughter from pre-school during the day. It was a difficult day because my friend and I had a project deadline. Then she said she would handle it herself. She saved me at that time. Later, when she was in difficult situations, I helped her too (Monika).

When they closed schools and kindergartens during the pandemic, we had this informal agreement at work, with the director's permission, that we could come to work with children. They would play together in one of the classrooms or in our park, and we could work in peace (Magda).

Moreover, Anna and Aleksandra mentioned situations when during afternoon and evening openings, museum employees sometimes came with their children, taking turns in looking after them because they had no other option at home.

Furthermore, the support from co-workers was often psychological. The very possibility of conversation, sharing problems, and talking about difficulties without the fear of judgment was of great importance for the respondents, including motivating them to work and develop:

Generally, there were only women at our community center. Practically all had children or were planning to have children. That's why supported each other from the very beginning. This consisted of concrete help at work and the opportunity to talk, at times complain (Agnieszka).

When new female employees joined the organizations, these informal support networks grew naturally. As Kamila emphasized, women retiring from work did not always leave the community as they often continued to support those who stayed.

All respondents foregrounded that if it had not been for various forms of formal and informal support available at their workplaces, their professional paths would have been completely different. For most, informal support was an extremely important complement to the organizational solutions they used outside of workplaces, namely support from their partners/husbands, other family members (mainly grandmothers), but also systemic solutions in the scope of nursery and preschool care: "This is the reason I didn't quit my job, although sometimes I was really fed up with it" (Agnieszka).

The respondents emphasized that family life and related responsibilities greatly affected their work dynamics, sometimes inhibiting and sometimes enhancing their development:

The immense family responsibilities associated with raising three children hugely impacted my professional career. I'm glad that I still managed to achieve so much; although I probably would have achieved

much more without children. I had the opportunity to change jobs but decided not to because I probably wouldn't be able to work properly. Of course, I don't regret it, but [my career] would probably look differently (Aleksandra).

Marta indicated that she had only started to think about promotion and career when her family situation stabilized, and her daughter became independent. She had a good environment in the community center where she works, but she felt ready to develop professionally only when the amount of her non-work-related duties decreased.

5 | DISCUSSION

Having described the complexity of women's professional paths, their personal experiences, the challenges they encounter on their way, and ways they use to deal with them, this section will focus on discussing the nature of professional development strategies used by women working in cultural organizations. During the discussion, the six principles of the rhizome as proposed by Deleuze and Guattari (1987) translated into the studied phenomenon were highlighted. In this way, it was possible to capture the rhizomatic character of the strategies used by the female workforce during the development of their professional paths.

The study showed that despite numerous changes in recent decades regarding the approach to organizational roles, especially highlighting the changes that occurred in the organizational roles of women (Klenke, 2017), there can still be evidence found in public cultural organizations that corroborate the notion that cultural workplaces are increasingly dependent on the retraditionalized "incitement of family relations of appropriation" (Adkins, 1999, p.132). It corresponds with the results of previous studies conducted in this area (Banks, 2007; Gill, 2002, 2007; McRobbie, 2002; Morini, 2007; Perrons, 2003; Richards & Milestone, 2000; Ross, 2003; Swanson & Wise, 2000; Tams, 2002; Willis & Dex, 2003; Wyatt & Henwood, 2000). Women face numerous challenges in their professional development in this sector, thus complicating their career paths. The fact that they significantly outnumber men in public cultural organizations does not change this situation. These challenges have an impact on the way their professional development strategies are shaped.

When analyzing the stories of women and their professional paths, from the very beginning, one can observe signs of their nonlinear nature and identify special moments or parts of their career progression that can be compared to Deleuzian plateaus—groups of intense connections that sustain a creative energy of their own and which can be evoked by at any time by various challenges appearing. Those "plateaus" can be formed by various aspects in women's work paths: tasks or projects that they are involved in at their workplaces or events that occur in their non-professional lives but which have an impact on the progression of their professional careers, such as various family obligations. Although initially seen as disturbances, they consequently act as catalysts for growth, as they initiate new connections with resources needed for growth at a given time. They are the origin for building professional development strategies that acquire in time the features of rhizomatic structures that, in the case of these research participants, were shaped as a result of the interaction of the research respondents with their organizations, colleagues, and the external world for their workplaces.

The rhizome is characterized by the principles of connection and heterogeneity, which means that it constantly looks for connections with new resources that can help it grow. These resources are connected based on structures and hierarchies that not necessarily reflect the formal structures of organization, but which serve the rhizome best at a given time (Lawley, 2005). The research participants quickly discovered the existence of informal organizations, communities present in cultural organizations that operate in parallel to formal structures, and naturally became part of them. In this way, they had access to the resources they could reach when needed. Many of the women felt like they were part of a strong community of like-minded people with whom they could collaboratively work and share contacts and resources. According to the respondents, these communities were based on informal solutions initiated in the personal support networks of female members. The respondents emphasized the role of collegial relationships

in the workplace as the major factor that enabled them to smoothly navigate the meanders of their jobs, combine professional and nonprofessional responsibilities, and grow. Often, these communities extended beyond organizational boundaries, with families and friends being an important part of them. Thus, these communities assumed the form of complex organizational networks whose purpose was mutual support and growth. These networks have a characteristic horizontal, rhizomatic dynamic that is shaped by a strong relationship with the environment (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). The basis of these networks were interpersonal ties, created in the process of shared experience (Chia, 1999; Clegg et al., 2005). For the respondents, the scope and development of these networks were crucial to the development of their careers. In their view, without networks, they would not have the opportunity to grow as much, participate in new projects, or face new challenges that advanced their careers. At the same time, these networks allowed them to fulfill other responsibilities resulting from their social roles (wives, mothers, daughters) but also aimed at mutual mental support, which helped them in their efforts in personal and professional development. Similar communities have been studied so far as examples of social bonding capital that women, for example, by Ganapati (2012), who showed that they are therapeutic in nature and help women gain empowerment.

While describing the rhizome, Deleuze and Guattari wrote also about the principles of multiplicity and asignifying rupture. The rhizome can grow in any direction at any time. It is a-centered and a-hierarchical. It can be disrupted at any point, but this will rather open new ways for growth instead of stopping it. Women who took part in this study often knew that working in public cultural organizations has the characteristics of a double-edged sword: the possibility of enhanced creative freedom is often accompanied by greater (self-)exploitation. Similar conclusions can be drawn from previous research on women who work in the creative sector (McRobbie, 2002). This research uncovered how their supervisors expected women to adopt traditionalized female roles, either directly in the context of employment in administrative or “support” occupations or indirectly. This significantly affected their engagement in substantive work, which was necessary for further professional development. However, this situation did not affect their motivation to work and develop in this sector in the long run. However, each respondent had moments of crisis in their professional life and doubts about their potential for further development. Still, the respondents perceived it as a natural element of work reality, which they had to accept and cope with. The informal organizational constructs co-created by the respondents were in constant motion and continuously responded to the needs of their members helping them to deal with various disruptions. For example, this happened when there was a need to align work rhythms with family responsibilities during the COVID-19 pandemic. Thus, informal organizational constructs filled empty spaces like rhizomes, whenever there was a possibility and need (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). This way of thinking can be translated into the principle of multiplicity. At the same time, the research participants were quite quick to learn from their colleagues the rules of the organizations, which were often in conflict with the idealized cultural organizations that the respondents had imagined, that is, places where the work culture was supposed to reflect creative ideas. Instead, the organizations turned out highly hierarchical, formal, and based on traditional values, with an arborescent structure that reflected hierarchical systems of formal organizations (Gomes De Oliveira Zioli et al., 2021).

The principles of the rhizome are cartography and decalcomania, meaning that there is no common model that would guide a person through certain path. Although there might be some similarities seen, each person creates and follows a self-selected individual pathway and embraces the uncertainty that comes with it. When looking closely at the stories of the respondents, it can be noticed that there is a structural or generative model that could explain how the strategies for their professional development look like. From the beginning, the respondents repeatedly emphasized that their stories about work would be complex. Upon entering cultural organizations, none of the respondents received guidance—a map of possible activities, especially those that would lead to their professional development—although many thought such a thing was unnecessary because the rules in public organizations are simple and clear, so it would suffice to follow the experience of their predecessors. The trajectory of professional paths of the respondents was also marked by different, expected, and unexpected events in their professional and nonprofessional lives, not to mention the environment. It turned out that everyone must draw a “map” of action of their work on their own, as it emerges in live contact with the surrounding organizational reality, it changes depending on the person

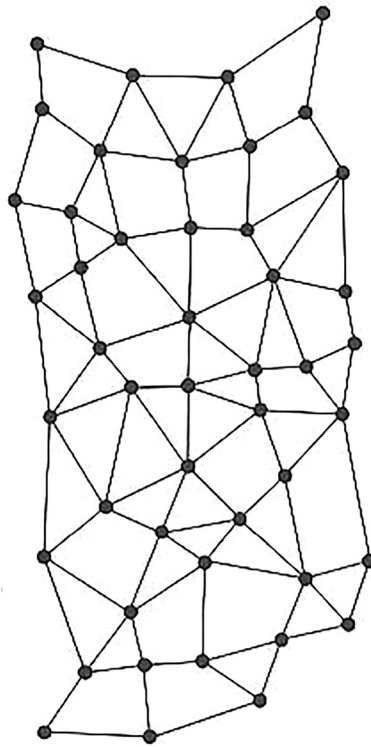


FIGURE 1 Women's career development strategy seen as a *Rhizome*. Source: own work.

and their needs, it is not subject to any patterns, and it has many entrances and exits (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987; Michon, 2021).

An attempt to describe career development in a cultural organization from the perspective of its female employees causes the emergence of several overlapping images. The first of them refers to the professional path trajectories of women, which are full of twists and challenges and do not have linear structures and look like rhizomes, as shown in Figure 1. Often the shift from one point in the career to the other is disrupted by several microscopic "junctions" that are distractive in their nature, such as additional tasks at work and outside of work. However, those junctions can be seen as triggers which cause arising of networks, which, like Deleuzian plateaus, represented on Figure 1 by dots, can release new energy, often by initiating new or tightening already existing communities at work, but also by opening new directions for personal growth. Instead of being disturbances, they seem to be catalysators of growth. They represent intense connections that women are making on their work paths as a response to various challenges that appear. These plateaus connect people, places, and other resources that help women grow. Those are not based on already known structures, for example, organizational or any preexisting relations, but are being built based on what is needed at a moment. They are nonhierarchical. The connections are developing in various directions; they can never be broken, as if there is any kind of rupture, they seek other ways and resources that could help to overcome them. The strategies are like a Deleuzian map, each time being drawn and followed differently by those who decide to follow a similar strategy.

The second image that can be noticed while looking at cultural institution is a picture of the organization as vertical and arborescent, which reflects the formal organizational structure of the organization. It overlaps with the rhizomatic structures of women's career progression strategies that penetrate this tree in all directions, establishing a horizontal structure that is vividly responsive to the needs of the environment, as presented in Figure 2. This aligns with proposals by Linstead and Thanem (2007) who in their discussion, propose an understanding of the organization

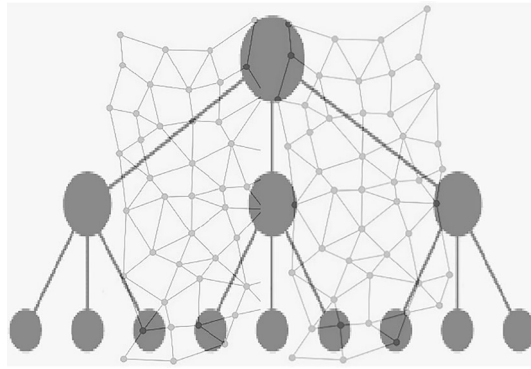


FIGURE 2 Women's career paths in cultural organizations. Source: own work.

as creatively antisuversive: not fixed but in motion, never resting, and constantly trembling. Unlike trees, rhizomes usually remain invisible. Similarly, women's professional paths are not at the forefront of organizations. Only by deepening their organizational life can we see how they permeate existing formal structures, complementing and supporting them for efficient operations. They are alive, creative, non-hierarchical, and do not easily yield to adversity. Their goal is the growth, but often not individual, but of the whole community that emerged along and across them and its well-being, both communal and that of its individual members.

6 | CONCLUSIONS

The female workforce of public cultural organizations is at times angry and frustrated, but is also passionate, resilient, and resourceful. On one hand, working in cultural organizations brings many benefits: the opportunity to commune with art and people who appreciate culture, the possibility to advocate for issues and ideas that matter to society, and the chance to do meaningful work for the public. On the other hand, such work is also precarious; employees worry about living wages, job security, internal work culture, and power relations. And these concerns are strongly related to gender. Moreover, as also suggested by Adkins (1999), these adversities are reinforced by the traditional model of public cultural organizations. However, women who participate in this system find ways to cope with reality and fulfill their career ambitions.

The conclusion of the study is that to fully understand the complexity of the experience of women in organizations, it is necessary to look beyond the *terra firma* of already known ways of thinking about organizations. By reaching for the rhizome metaphor, it was attempted to understand from the women's perspective the complexity of their work experiences and the organizations that employ them. However, reaching for the concept of the rhizome to explain the studied phenomenon does not mean that the existence of arborescence is being denied. Instead, it shows that the rhizome metaphor opens the understanding to the microscopic movements present in this arborescence—a desire for life (Gomes De Oliveira Zioli et al., 2021)—as evidenced by the women communities that operate in public cultural organizations. In this way, the organization seen through the lens of the rhizome has a double meaning (Linstead & Thanem, 2007)—as a formal organization and an engagement in life—which can be understood as observing the movements of rhizome production. Thus, the rhizomatic way of organizing is more than a space of order, formalities, and stratification (Gomes De Oliveira Zioli et al., 2021), because it is the experimentation of multiplicity, in which movements are part of the organization. This is how women in public cultural organizations function.

However, the findings presented in this article are limited in that they are based on the perceptions of 20 women working in Polish public cultural organizations. Thus, their voices are not generalizable, but they still offer several points of departure for future research. Enabling women with different backgrounds to share stories about their

experience working in cultural organizations and developing their professional paths may inadvertently promote side effects such as perpetuating stereotypes about professional women. However, amplifying women's voices about both positive and negative experiences is consistent with Tong's view (1989) that feminist resistance can emerge from challenging the status quo. Moreover, the desired outcome of doing so "can potentially remove the glass ceiling" in organizations (Reuther & Fairhurst, 2000, p. 248). Finally, it is believed that the insights from this study extend beyond the public cultural organizations, as there are many other examples of similar female experiences in organizations worthy of exploration that would support the development of a more comprehensive theory of the rhizomatic way of organizing.

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CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

The authors have no conflicts of interest to declare that are relevant to the content of this article.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The data that support the findings of this study are available on request from the corresponding author. The data are not publicly available due to privacy or ethical restrictions.

ORCID

Anna Góral  <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8868-3958>

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AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

Anna Góral—organizational and management researcher, PhD, Assistant Professor at the Institute of Culture, Faculty of Management and Social Communication, Jagiellonian University in Kraków, Poland. Much of her ongoing work focuses on the community building and governance, communities' self-organization and networking. She is also interested in diversity management and in particular in studying female leadership in feminized organizations.

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