

# CHANGING IMAGE?

## Female Journalists in Luxembourg<sup>226</sup>

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### General Overview

As small a country Luxembourg might be in size (ca. 400,000 inhabitants), this does not exclude it from its role in the wider debate on the status of women in arts and media professions. In fact, Luxembourg has been quite involved in both studying women in the arts as well as promoting equality throughout its society; the present Minister of Culture is Erna Hennicot-Schoepges and the long term Director General in charge of the arts and media at the European Commission has been Colette Flesch, Luxembourg.

In 1905, the second ever study on women in the arts in Europe was conducted by Anton Hirsch, director of the then-existing *Grossherzogliche Kunst- und Gewerbeschule* in Luxembourg and entitled *Die Bildenden Künstlerinnen der Neuzeit*. This research compared the work of women artists in 15 European countries and the United States. Today, the Service de la condition feminine carries on the tradition of documenting and monitoring female artists and their work in co-operation with bodies such as the Cid - Centre d'Information et de Documentation des Femmes, and the Ministère de la Promotion Féminine. Incidentally, the three organisations collaborated in 1998 on a festival of contemporary female musicians in Luxembourg including a roundtable with female artists who described their working conditions which, in fact, do not differ much from those described in other parts of Europe let aside the fact that the national market and training opportunities in Luxembourg are very limited. Therefore, many artists, writers and journalists have become used to looking for work opportunities in neighbouring countries, as a consequence.

The Conseil National des Femmes Luxembourgeoises (CNFL), brings together over 12 women's associations in Luxembourg whose goals are to achieve equality in different areas of life including decision-making positions. In 1999, they set up an observatory to monitor the participation of women in the elections. The CNFL was founded in 1975. To date, there are no associations or groups of women artists or media professionals listed as belonging to the CNFL. Perhaps it could consider including female representatives from the arts or media communities under its wide umbrella of women's associations ranging from political to religious orientations.

Despite their under-representation in the CNFL, female associations of media professionals, journalists in particular, have been active in raising awareness about the status of women in this field through radio programmes as well as research projects. In 1996, "Image des femmes

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dans les médias", an independent work group of female journalists under the auspices of the press council, initiated a survey to explore not only the working life of women journalists but also the image of women in the Luxembourg media. One of the longer term goals of the group was to obtain legitimization to further investigate the image of women in the media based on the opinion of colleagues. In December 1996, a survey was sent to all journalists in possession of a Luxembourg press card (222 journalists). While the return rate of responses was considered to be low (28%), there are still lessons to be learned.

### **Who are Luxembourg Journalists?**

In 1996 24% of all journalists were female. The age profile<sup>228</sup> of all Luxembourg journalists is the following:

- higher percentage of young female than male journalists
- lower percentage of older female than male journalists

*Female journalists have higher qualifications than their male counterparts.* Three quarters of the female respondents, but only two thirds of the male respondents indicated that they had obtained their *Abitur* (high school diploma). Two thirds of the female journalists, but only barely half of the male journalists obtained a degree in a –foreign - university in fields such as journalism or communication studies.

*Very few women occupy top or executive positions.* Only 14% of females working in the media sector occupy a leading position (head of department or chief editor). One explanation put forward by the group undertaking the survey was that women currently working in the field lack the experience to obtain such top positions. (e.g. 75% of full time employed female journalists are younger than forty and have less than ten years work experience) The group also speculated whether the consistently lower status of women was not also due in part to combining their work with family responsibilities. The latter has yet to be explored.

*Female journalists earn less than their male colleagues.* Of those journalists earning more than 150 000 Luxembourg Francs gross income per year, 80% of them are men. In contrast women make up the majority of those in the lower income bracket (110-150 000 F). This pattern reflects the situation above: Men have been working longer and have higher positions than women and therefore, earn more money.

*Family life does not prevent journalists from working.* The majority of female journalists who are mothers work part time while not one male journalist who is a father interrupted or limited his work in order to care for children. Given the "unusual" working hours of journalists, women with under-aged children often resort to engaging professional babysitters rather than leaving their children at day care centres.

### **Female Journalists, the Media and Promoting Equal Opportunities**

At the UNESCO Intergovernmental conference on cultural policies and development, April 1998, it has been stated that "equality can only be achieved when men and women work to-

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<sup>228</sup> Profile based on survey respondents.

gether on such goals".<sup>229</sup> Unfortunately, there is more work to be done to encourage male journalists to report on topics such as emancipation and equal rights. To date, they mostly report on politics, business and sports. According to the Luxembourg survey results, two thirds of female journalists and barely half of the male journalists said they reported on women topics and equal rights occasionally or on a regular basis. Male respondents generally indicated that such topics were being covered by their colleagues and therefore was not necessary for them to engage in following these specific stories.

A similar attitude is taken with regard to media content and its production. While men and women generally agree that women are all too often stereotyped as housewives and mothers, far more women than men indicated that they are generally quoted too seldom in the media. Women remain optimistic that the image of themselves in the Luxembourg media can change, while men are not so encouraged.

*Follow-up work needs to be done* on the survey results carried out by the group "Image des femmes dans les médias". Nevertheless, the few results which do exist present indeed a challenge to the Press Council and the professional associations of journalists in Luxembourg to act.

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<sup>229</sup> In a speech delivered by Vigdis Finnbogadóttir, former president of Iceland in the ERICarts session, "Women, Equality and Cultural Policy".