

The place of women in the theatres of São Paulo: from writing to performing

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this article was to provide quantitative information about the gender gap in theatre production in the city of São Paulo (Brazil), thereby helping to raise awareness of the inequalities faced by women in the field. The text compares the opportunities available to men and women working in seven different theatre-related occupations and is underpinned by a mapping of 1,466 plays performed in the city throughout 2018. The data were collected from three weekly guides published by the local media and two monthly publications: a theatre guide and a magazine from a cultural institution that ran 20 cultural venues in the city. Any gaps were then filled by directly contacting theatre venues and the producers of the plays. There was a significant imbalance towards men in the two most strategic theatre production jobs: men wrote 77% of the plays and directed 78% of them. Thus, male professionals were a huge majority precisely in the functions responsible for building the discourse that reaches audiences. Compared to women, this left them in a much better position to express their values, ideas, and perspectives. This gap was smaller when considering performers, of which 46% were female. Women were also largely absent in technical occupations given that they were a minority among lighting directors and set designers. However, women represented the majority among costume designers. The most unexpected result was the parity among producers, with 52% being women. All the aforementioned gaps increased when the number of performances were considered. On average, women worked less in plays that provided more working time that were therefore, more likely to have higher salaries. This current study also showed that when women were responsible for writing, directing, or producing a play, the gender gap was reduced in all the other functions.

Keywords: Gender inequality, economy of culture, performing arts, creative workforce

SUMMARY

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INTRODUCTION

Arts professionals are proud to highlight how the area is interested in embracing causes associated with civil rights, racial minorities, and a progressive agenda. But can we say that support for these causes is manifested not only in works of art, through their content and storytelling, but also in their practices and in the way art is produced? This article investigates this question, focusing on the issue of gender representation in the performing arts by analysing the place of women in the theatres of São Paulo, the largest city in Brazil. It looks specifically at the number of women in the labour market with respect to seven different occupations within theatrical production: playwright, director, producer, performer, lighting director, set designer, and costume designer.

Starting with a brief contextualisation of the cultural scene in Brazil and São Paulo, the text details the data set supporting the article and highlights the challenges of using quantitative data to investigate an area characterised by intermittent jobs and large groups of self-employed professionals, as well as by diverse means of production, which combine commercial plays, independent producers, and the work of artist collectives. It also includes a brief description of theatrical activity in the city as a way to provide a better perspective of the performing arts scene beyond the data.

The investigation was anchored in a comprehensive mapping survey of theatre production in the city of São Paulo in 2018, which registered 1,466 plays and a total 13,993 performances, including

commercial and independent plays. On the one hand, the data collected in São Paulo showed that most plays were written (77%) and directed (78%) by men. On the other hand, women were predominant among producers (52%), a strategic decision-making position. The results showing a bias against women are consistent with most of the studies conducted in other countries. Since there no single consolidated method to collect and analyse data about theatre production is available, especially regarding the professionals working in the sector, the researchers explored the topic based on the available information, which varied from country to country.

In France, Coulangeon, Ravet, and Roharik (2015) conducted their work using data from an employers' association (*Caisse des Congés Spectacles*). In the United Kingdom, there were studies working with data from a private company providing ticketing and marketing services to theatre venues (Purple Seven, 2015); research by Elizabeth Freestone with *The Guardian* focused on the top 10 subsidised theatres in England from 2012 to 2013 (Freestone and Higgins, 2012); and an initiative funded by the Arts Council analysed data from the National Portfolio Organizations from 2015 to 2018 (Sphinx Theatre, 2020). All the UK studies were supported by meaningful, but not exhaustive samples. In Spain, data came from the Active Population Survey (Ministerio de Cultura y Deporte, 2021), although these were not specific to theatre (they also included other performing arts), as well as a study focused on actors and dancers that had included 3,000 interviews (Fundación AISGE, 2016). Regardless of the data set supporting the investigations, and their limitations, all the research yielded similar results which reinforced the existence of a gender gap in favour of men.

In the case of São Paulo, the data analysis explored the quantitative results from four different perspectives, always supported by descriptive statistics. First, it looked at the absolute number of men and women working in seven occupations

in theatre production (number of professionals). Second, it explored how these results fluctuated when we considered the number of plays. Third, it added the number of performances to the analysis because these were a better reference of the global labour market. This approach showed that the imbalances in the market share occupied by men and women recorded in the first two steps increased when we looked more deeply into the data. Finally, we analysed how having a man or a woman in a decision-making position impacted the gender distribution of the other six occupations. This cross analysis showed that inequalities were reduced when a play was written, directed, or produced by a woman.

Lack of data

In spite of several developments in cultural policies in the last three decades, such as the creation of culture secretariats in states and municipalities and of the National System of Culture, implementation of fiscal incentive laws and public calls for subsidies in the three levels of government, and opening of the National Agency for Cinema (*Ancine, Agência Nacional do Cinema*) and Brazilian Institute of Museums (*Ibram, Instituto Brasileiro de Museus*), a huge gap still remains in Brazil in terms of compiling basic statistics about the cultural scene. The country has not built public awareness regarding the importance of gathering simple data about cultural production. Brazil has not yet implemented its Cultural Satellite Account, the “gross domestic product (GDP) of culture,” does not have an official cultural habits survey, and there is no official public department or private institution producing regular data or reports about theatre production.

In fact, the gap is not exclusive to theatre because it affects most cultural sectors in the country. The only activity that managed to gather some data at a steady rate was cinema, thanks to the work developed by Ancine (www.ancine.gov.br), the public agency for the audiovisual environment, as well as private companies like Filme B (www.filmeb.com.br). Established

in 2009, the Brazilian Institute for Museums (IBRAM in its Portuguese acronym¹) published some initial data about the sector in 2013, but the initiative had a short reach and did not stimulate the further and deeper collection of data.

This scenario makes it difficult to build evidence-based diagnoses about the multiple challenges facing the cultural scene, thereby undermining the government's ability to implement measures to effectively address them. The situation is particularly worrying in the performing arts where the data shortage is more critical. Beyond that, the COVID-19 pandemic added another layer of problems to the cultural arena. First, the entire live performance market—one of the most affected sectors in the world—was hit hard. The pandemic also increased the multiple inequalities in the whole job market, including the gender gap.

In the particular case of Brazil, there was a final challenge. President Jair Bolsonaro's government undervalued the importance of culture, provided limited public funds for the area, and did not support gender equality. The Ministry of Culture was extinguished in 2019 and the new Secretariat of Culture was assigned first to the Ministry of Citizenship and then in the Ministry of Tourism. In the three years of Bolsonaro's administration, the Secretariat of Culture had five secretaries and the National Foundation for the Arts (*Funarte, Fundação Nacional de Artes*), which managed the performing arts in the country, had six presidents. Indeed, official data available on the online service of the Federal Senate (<https://www12.senado.leg.br/orcamento/sigabrasil>) shows that Funarte saw its budget reduced by 26% between 2015 and 2019 (values adjusted for inflation as of to December 2020). These factors reinforce the importance of producing data about theatre activities as a way of raising awareness about the challenges facing the sector, including the gender gap.

Theatre context

Regardless of this lack of data in the country, it is possible to find some highlights regarding the theatrical scene. Brazilian theatre production is highly concentrated in the cities of São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro, following a tendency also found in developed countries in the global north. The same situation is also seen in France (Menger, 1999), Spain (Colomer, 2016), and the United Kingdom, where most theatre venues and performances are concentrated in Paris, Madrid, Barcelona, and London, respectively. With an estimated population of 12.4 million inhabitants², São Paulo is the largest of the 5,570 cities of the country. In 2019, the average salary of formal workers was 4.1× the minimum wage (totalling around 718 euros in November of 2021), the 17th highest among Brazilian cities, compared to 2018 when the GDP per capita was the 271st highest.

Even though no comprehensive research allowing us to quantify the growth of the theatre market in recent decades in São Paulo is available, several factors influenced its development. These include a meaningful improvement in education and recovery and expansion of the Brazilian economy from the mid-90s to 2015, as well as some specific legislation that helped to increase investments in the area. Theatre production was boosted by incentive tax laws created at the federal (*Lei Rouanet*) and state levels (*Proac-SP*) and by a specific municipal program designated to fund artist collectives in São Paulo, the Theatre Promotion Law (*Lei de Fomento ao Teatro*).

Concerning education—a key driving force to stimulate people to engage in cultural activities (Bourdieu, 1979)—the country doubled the number of people enrolled in universities from 2001 to 2010. Thus, this significant improvement in education has started to build an audience for the theatre. In developed countries, access to theatre activities is quite stable among people aged 20 to

1 IBRAM, the *Instituto Brasileiro de Museus* (<https://www.museus.gov.br>).

2 All the data used in this paragraph came from <https://cidades.ibge.gov.br/brasil/sp/sao-paulo/panorama>.

60 or 70 years old, as shown by the series of official surveys conducted in France (*Pratiques Culturelles en France*) and Spain (*Encuesta de Hábitos y Prácticas Culturales*). In contrast, data from Brazil show that attendance is higher among younger people but that it begins to decline much earlier, when people reach their 30s and 40s (Souza e Silva, 2018), thereby reflecting a generational gap in terms of education levels. Thus, with greater access to universities, new generations are more likely to attend cultural activities, including the theatre.

Economic development increased supply and demand for cultural goods and services. The number of cinemas mapped by Ancine (<https://oca.ancine.gov.br/>)—which were at their lowest levels in 1995 (1,033)—doubled to 2,045 in 2005 and reached a historic high in 2019 with 3,507 outlets. During this period, several cultural venues, including theatres, museums, and historic buildings, were inaugurated or restored. Some of them attracting tourists from all over the country and abroad, such as the Museum of Tomorrow (<https://museudoamanha.org.br/>) in Rio de Janeiro. Theatre also benefited from two decades of growth, from 1995 to 2015, particularly in the cities of São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro. Although the purpose of this text was not to detail this process (important work that must be carried out), some references could help to understand how the scenario shown in the mapping study, as well as some of its characteristics, were promoted. Economic growth boosted the development of theatre in the city in two main directions: by expanding funding for production and stimulating the opening of new cultural venues for the performing arts.

Increased funding came especially from incentive tax laws and public calls for grants. Implemented in 1991, the Rouanet Law designated R\$5.9 billion³

(€904 million)⁴ to theatre activities between 2000 and 2018, 42% and 28% to the states of São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro, respectively. Indeed, following the federal legislation, many states created similar mechanisms. The Program of Cultural Actions of the State of São Paulo (*Proac – Programa de Ações Culturais do Estado de São Paulo*) was implemented in 2006, and, beyond the tax incentives law, the *Proac-ICMS*⁵, also included a call for grants, called the *Proac-Editais*. In 2002, the city of São Paulo has created special legislation called the Theatre Promotion Law, to promote the activities of theatre collectives that carry out continuous research and production work. The first mechanism was integral to boosting the production of commercial plays, particularly musicals, which were also supported by the *Proac-ICMS*. The ‘off-Broadway’ productions, plays with less commercial potential and the works of collectives were supported mainly by *Proac-Editais* and the Theatre Promotion Law.

Parallel to that, economic growth had at least two direct impacts on the number of theatre venues in the city. Funded by a tax associated with commercial activities, the SESC-SP⁶ (the São Paulo Commerce Social Service) opened several cultural venues in the city this century, also increasing the number of plays contracted for performances in its cultural venues. Municipal legislation from 1991, which required the building of at least one theatre and one cinema in new shopping centres, simultaneously contributed to increasing the number of commercial theatres in the city of São Paulo since the late 1990s. Unfortunately, no systematic data has been collected that would allow us to build a clearer picture of how these two factors (funding and new venues) impacted the theatre market, particularly regarding the number

3 Values corrected for inflation by the IPCA-E up until January 2021.

4 Conversion on 24 May 2021: 1€ = R\$6.5.

5 The ICMS (*Imposto sobre Comercialização de Mercadorias e Serviços*) is a state tax charged on the circulation of goods and services.

6 The SESC-SP is one of the leading private cultural and leisure institutions in São Paulo, with 43 venues in the state and high profile artistic and cultural programming.

of plays performed in the city, audiences, and job opportunities that have opened up. This work still needs to be done.

MAPPING METHODOLOGY

Regardless of the multiple blind spots, this brief sketch allows us to glimpse a panorama of São Paulo theatre production characterised by different funding sources, great diversity in production style, and a corresponding variety of theatre venues housing these plays. Even though the picture painted by the mapping study dates to 2018—two years after the beginning an economic crisis that interrupted a positive cycle spanning two decades—the image still shows the outlines of growth registered in the previous 20 years. The surveying of theatre production in the city of São Paulo was funded and conducted by J.Leiva Cultura & Esporte (www.jleiva.co), my consultancy company, with the cooperation of three theatre associations, the Independent Theatre Movement of São Paulo, Association of Independent Theatre Producers (MOTIN and APTI, respectively, in their Portuguese acronyms⁷), and Theatre Co-operative of São Paulo⁸, which facilitated contact with theatre producers.

The data collection was supported by information published in cultural guides from the leading newspapers and magazines published in the city, accompanied by the work of contacting independent theatre venues and cultural producers to include as many plays as possible in the mapping. The main sources of information were the weekly guides published by newspapers *Folha de S. Paulo* (*Guia da Folha*) and *Estado de S. Paulo* (*Guia do Estadão*), the magazine *Veja* (*Veja São Paulo*), and the monthly guides *OFF Guia de Teatro* (www.guiaoff.com.br)—a publication specialis-

ing in theatre—and *Revista Em Cartaz* (https://www.sescsp.org.br/online/revistas/tag/5557_EM+CARTAZ), which presents cultural activities from 20 cultural venues from the SESC-SP. The contact work was also important because these publications do not include all the plays running in the city or their complete production details.

The results were debated with theatre professionals in a seminar in July 2019 and are accessible in the report *A força do teatro na cidade de São Paulo* (JLeiva, 2019). There were certainly gaps in the mapping, particularly from smaller and independent venues, open public spaces (like parks), and cultural institutions that do not stage regular theatre performances. However, these gaps did not compromise the robustness of the sample because these venues had a limited market share in the overall theatre scene of the city. From the original data collection, which recorded 1,638 plays performed in São Paulo, 1,466 were considered in the gender comparison of this present study.

Plays providing no information about their professionals were excluded. Stand-up comedies and all foreign productions were also eliminated. The former because the mapping was not sufficiently comprehensive to include every play from this genre and because the study of stand-up acts requires specific methodology because they take place in venues where several short 10 to 20-minute performances are presented on the same day. The latter were excluded because the focus was on the local labour market. The mapping included other Brazilian theatre productions not from São Paulo. Regardless of the regional origin, these plays provided a job opportunity in the local theatre market. It is also worth pointing out that after São Paulo, Rio de Janeiro was the most important theatre hub in the country and that a meaningful number of commercial plays produced in either of these cities also tour in the other.

Final sample

The final sample included data from 1,466 plays and 269 different cultural venues or spaces in the

7 MOTIN: *Movimento dos Teatros Independentes de São Paulo* (<http://www.motin.org.br>) and APTI: *Associação dos Produtores Teatrais Independentes* (<https://www.apti.org.br>).

8 Cooperativa Paulista de Teatro (<https://www.cooperativadeteatro.com.br>).

city of São Paulo, totalling 13,993 performances⁹ in 2018. Regarding genre, the plays were split between those intended for children (450) and those aimed at adults (1,017), according to information disclosed by producers or the cultural guides we consulted. In some cases, when no direct contact with the producers was possible and there was no information available in the cultural guides, the classification was made based on the synopsis of the play. Productions with no age restrictions and aimed at the whole family, were classified as being for adults. The data showed that 79% of all performances recorded were aimed at adults, even though 69% of all plays were targeted to this audience.

No distinctions were made regarding the funding sources or the kind of production (commercial or alternative). The former information was much more difficult to collect (the mapping gathered only some of its highlights but did not allow any in-depth analysis) while the latter was quite complicated and required conceptual definitions beyond the scope of this article. Since the production details of the cast and creatives were not available for all the plays, each of the seven functions investigated here has a different sample size. Most of the publications included only the name of the playwright, director, and the main performers. Even though we tried to contact the producers to complete missing data, it was impossible to gather exactly the same kind of information for every play. Many producers did not answer our emails and, beyond that, each production disclosed information about their cast and creatives differently, including or excluding specific professionals depending on their understanding of the creative process and contributing artists. Nevertheless, with additional online research, we managed to collect sufficient data for all seven functions being analysed.

Information about gender was added two years after completion of the mapping, specifically for the purpose

of this article. In Portuguese, in most cases, it is possible to identify whether someone identifies as male or female by reading their name. In cases of doubt, the information was consulted online. Nonetheless, we realise that this method did not allow us to include all gender identities or expressions which would only have been possible by contacting all the professionals (around 7,000 people) directly. However, we believe the sample gave us a fairly accurate picture of the job market for women in the performing arts in São Paulo, the ultimate objective of the study. The mapping also registered several collectives of artists within the seven functions. In these cases, it was impossible to identify the gender of the artists working in each collective or how many professionals participated in each function. The growing importance these groups have achieved in the cultural scene of São Paulo in recent years justifies specific research into how they are addressing the gender issue.

Figure 1 shows the main details of the final sample, including the number of plays and performances, division between productions for children and adults, number of plays with data for each of the seven functions investigated, and the corresponding data by the number of performances. All the figures presented in this study were derived from this database. In the case of playwrights, directors and performers, most of the data was available for the plays (97%, 94% and 91%, respectively). For all the other functions, the information was accessible for more than 50% of the sample: 76% for producers, 55% for lighting design, 54% for costume design, and 53% for set design. The plays for which we had information from all seven functions represented 40% of the total sample (585 plays) and were responsible for 49% of all the performances. Although a significant number of plays were mapped, we must mention the negative caveat that some plays were performed very little (only 10 times), reflecting the fact that most productions are from Friday to Sunday, and many plays are for children (often performed once a week). There is an ongoing discussion among theatre producers regarding how to expand the number of performances of plays.

⁹ The original mapping registered 277 different venues/spaces and 15,348 performances.

Figure 1 Sample details of the plays performed in the city of São Paulo.

General Information

Data collection: 01/01/2018 at 31/12/2018

Local: City of São Paulo

Number of plays: 1.466

Number of presentations: 13.993

GENRE	N° of plays	Percentage
For children	449	31 %
For adults	1,017	69 %
Total	1,466	100 %

GENRE	N° of performances	Percentage
For children	2,950	21 %
For adults	11,043	79 %
Total	13,993	100 %

Number of plays with available data for each function investigated

FUNCTION	N° of plays	Percentage
Playwright	1,417	97 %
Director	1,377	94 %
Producer	1,120	76 %
Performers	1,333	91 %
Lighting design	799	55 %
Set design	783	53 %
Costume design	791	54 %

Number of plays according to the number of functions with available data

N° of functions	N° of plays	Percentage
1	48	3 %
2	70	5 %
3	248	17 %
4	187	13 %
5	155	11 %
6	174	12 %
7 (all)	584	40 %
	1,466	100 %

N° of functions	N° of performances	Percentage
1	171	1 %
2	461	3 %
3	2,193	16 %
4	1,866	13 %
5	922	7 %
6	1,506	11 %
7 (all)	6,874	49 %
	13,993	100 %

Results

The results were compared by gender by taking different approaches. In the first approach, we looked at the number of men and women who worked on at least one play in 2018, considering the seven different functions previously mentioned. In other words, professionals who worked on more than one production in the same job role on them all, were counted just once. However, if they had performed different functions in different plays, the number of different job roles were counted as a way to compare the proportion of men and women performing each specific task.

These results showed a huge gender imbalance among playwrights and directors, the two key figures in theatre production. Of all the professionals who staged a text and directed a play, only 29% and 27%, respectively, were women. Interestingly, producers—the function that could be considered the third driving force in theatre production as a strategic job with at least some decision-making power—showed a fair balance between the sexes. Some 52% were women, the same participatory share they have in the Brazilian population¹⁰, according to the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE in its Portuguese acronym¹¹). This result will be explored in more detail later in this text. Figure 2 shows the percentage of men and women who worked in the theatres of São Paulo when (a) we did or (b) we did not count artist collectives. In the

case of producers, some companies were sometimes mentioned as managing this function.

The technical functions were biased in terms of the work performed by women, who were mainly costume designers (57%), and were strongly under-represented among lighting designers (25%) and set designers (36%). In this sense, one hypothesis is that the results could reflect traditional labour values, which are likely to have influenced the training market in the past, by attracting or rejecting women, thereby eventually helping to reproduce these gender differences in theatrical work. Therefore, women would have been given fair opportunities to work as costume designers but would not have been seen to be as fit as set designers or lighting designers—technical activities commonly associated with being ‘men’s work.’

When considering the cast, the gender gap was reduced, with women representing 46% of all the performers. This percentage was exactly the same as registered in France (Coulangeon, Ravet, and Roharik, 2005), even though the context and data source were completely different (the French researchers worked with information from a employers’ association). Given that the determining factor in the selection of a man or a woman for a character is based on who the playwrights had decided to represent in their scripts, the fact that these writers are predominantly men (71%) plays an important and decisive part in the gender of the cast. Perhaps this is because each gender would be more likely to talk about their own issues, thus influencing the gender of the characters portrayed on stage.

10 <https://educa.ibge.gov.br/jovens/conheca-o-brasil/populacao/18320-quantidade-de-homens-e-mulheres.html>

11 IBGE: *Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística*

Figure 2. Number of professionals in each function.

The results are shown considering (a) artist collectives and companies and (b) only men and women.

Men represented 71% of the playwrights and 73% of the directors.

Function	Men	Women	Collectives	Companies	Totals	
Playwrights	925 66%	387 27%	100 7%	0	1,412 100%	N° of Professionals Percentage
	925 71%	387 29%			1,312 100%	
Directors	797 70%	301 26%	46 4%	0	1,144 100%	N° of Professionals Percentage
	797 73%	301 27%			1,098 100%	
Producers	390 32%	422 35%	273 22%	133 11%	1,218 100%	N° of Professionals Percentage
	390 48%	422 52%			812 100%	
Performers	2,724 54%	2,314 45%	50 1%	0	5,088 100%	N° of Professionals Percentage
	2,724 54%	2,314 46%			5,088 100%	
Lighting designers	412 70%	135 23%	45 8%	0	592 100%	N° of Professionals Percentage
	412 75%	135 25%			547 100%	
Set designers	407 56%	226 31%	98 13%	0	731 100%	N° of Professionals Percentage
	407 64%	226 36%			633 100%	
Costume designers	268 38%	355 51%	78 11%	0	701 100%	N° of Professionals Percentage
	268 43%	355 57%			623 100%	

Note: Professionals who worked on more than one play, but in the same function (always as a director, for example), were counted just once. Professionals who performed two or three different functions were counted twice or three times, once for each function they worked in.

Elizabeth Freestone, who carried out research in this field in 2012 in partnership with *The Guardian* newspaper, blames William Shakespeare¹². We are allegedly reproducing a tendency derived from the days when plays were written for all-male companies. Her study indicated that only 16% of the characters created by Shakespeare were women. Of note, the bard was the playwright with the highest number of productions (29) and performances (240) considered in this current study, even more than 350 years after his death. What amounts to simple censorship was confirmed when we looked at the gender of the performers while also considering the gender of the corresponding playwrights. When the latter were men, 60% of the characters were also men; in the plays written by women, 54% of the characters were women. The data collected by Freestone showed figures of 63% and 49%, respectively, but only considered playwrights of new plays. Another difference was that her sample included only plays performed in the top 10 subsidised theatres in the UK.

In the second and third approaches to this work we focused on the number of plays and performances, respectively, providing some nuances to the analysis while also referencing the potential gender gaps in earnings. The differences in between the former (number of professionals) and the latter approach (number of plays) were because some professionals can work on more than one production and some plays use more than one professional to fulfil the seven functions analysed here. Thus, beyond the

artists' collectives, plays and consequently, performances, can employ multiple men or women for each of these tasks. Indeed, this current mapping registered men and women working together in all of the seven functions, with the producers reporting that some plays split a specific task between a person and an artist collective.

Regarding the comparison with the number of professionals mentioned above, we will now focus only on the plays in which only men or women had been in charge of each of the seven functions, excluding all the other multiple variants. Figure 3 (the number of plays) and figure 4 (the number of performances) show results for all the available combinations and confirm that this choice did not compromise the analysis because most of the plays fit into these categories. The exception was for the performers, which will require a specific analysis because this function does not have 'one person in charge.'

In addition, further investigation regarding the work of producers will be required because artist collectives are highly involved in this role. These current data reaffirm the gender imbalances, with the varying data pointing towards an increase in the gap disfavours women, as already identified in the analysis of the number of professionals. While there were slight differences in the results for production and the three technical functions when using the second and third approach, the imbalances (which were already quite significant), were extended even further for the key functions of playwright and director.

12 <https://www.theguardian.com/news/datablog/2012/dec/10/women-in-theatre-research-full-results>

Figure 3. Number of plays considering the gender of the person responsible for each function.

Data includes plays in which an artist collective or a company was responsible for a function.*

Women wrote 23% of the plays and directed 22% of the productions.

Function	Men	Women	C	M+C	W+C	M+W+C	Totals	
Playwrights	892 63%	260 18%	77 5%	20 1%	15 1%	153 11%	1,417 100%	N° of Plays Percentage
	892 77%	260 23%					1,152 100%	
Directors	955 69%	277 20%	50 4%	5 0,4%	3 0,2%	87 6%	1,377 100%	N° of Plays Percentage
	955 78%	277 22%					1,232 100%	
Producers	283 25%	273 24%	273 24%	82 7%	117 10%	92 8%	1,120 100%	N° of Plays Percentage
	283 51%	273 49%					556 100%	
Lighting designers	549 69%	165 21%	47 6%	0 0%	0 0%	38 5%	799 100%	N° of Plays Percentage
	549 77%	165 23%					714 100%	
Set designers	389 50%	204 26%	101 13%	10 1%	3 0,4%	76 10%	783 100%	N° of Plays Percentage
	389 66%	204 34%					593 100%	
Costume designers	237 30%	330 42%	68 9%	42 5%	44 6%	70 9%	791 100%	N° of Plays Percentage
	237 42%	330 58%					567 100%	

* C: artists' collectives. In the case of producers, the data also includes the plays produced by a company.

M+C: plays in which the function was led by a man and an artists' collective.

W+C: plays in which the function was led by a woman and an artists' collective.

M+W+C: plays in which the function was led by a man and a woman or by a man, a woman, and an artists' collective.

As an example, women accounted for 36% of all the set designers. Considering the number of plays, they oversaw this function in 34% of the productions, which in turn corresponded to 31% of the performances. Similar minor variations were found

for lighting designers and costume designers. The pattern was also similar for production, which had a fairer balance: 52% of all the producers were women and they were responsible for 49% of the works, accounting for 46% of the performances.

Figure 4. Number of plays considering the gender of the person responsible for each function.

Data includes plays in which an artist collective or a company was responsible for a function.*

Women wrote 19% of the performances and directed 18% of them.

Function	Men	Women	C	M+C	W+C	M+W+C	Totals	
Playwrights	9,367 68%	2,260 16%	384 3%	132 1%	115 1%	1,449 11%	13,707 100%	N° of Performances Percentage
	9,367 81%	2,260 19%					11,627 100%	
Directors	10,115 75%	2,175 16%	242 2%	7 0,1%	6 0,04%	962 7%	13,507 100%	N° of Performances Percentage
	10,115 82%	2,175 18%					12,290 100%	
Producers	3,377 30%	2,820 25%	1,971 18%	733 7%	950 9%	1,239 11%	11,090 100%	N° of Performances Percentage
	3,377 54%	2,820 46%					6,197 100%	
Lighting designers	5,975 72%	1,653 20%	192 2%	0 0%	0 0%	480 6%	8,300 100%	N° of Performances Percentage
	5,975 78%	1,653 22%					7,628 100%	
Set designers	4,621 55%	2,122 25%	679 8%	63 1%	10 0,1%	870 10%	8,365 100%	N° of Performances Percentage
	4,621 69%	2,122 31%					6,743 100%	
Costume designers	2,939 35%	3,244 38%	596 7%	549 6%	577 7%	599 7%	8,504 100%	N° of Performances Percentage
	2,939 48%	3,244 52%					6,183 100%	

* C: artists' collectives. In the case of producers, the data also includes the plays produced by a company.

M+C: plays in which the function was led by a man and an artists' collective.

W+C: plays in which the function was led by a woman and an artists' collective.

M+W+C: plays in which the function was led by a man and a woman or by a man, a woman, and an artists' collective.

However, the data for playwrights and directors showed a deeper and more meaningful change. When we considered only the professionals who wrote a text performed in São Paulo in 2018, 29% of the playwrights were women. The data for the

plays showed that 23% of the productions had a text written by a woman. Another decrease in female involvement was seen for the performances for which the playwright was female in only 19% of the cases. As shown in figure 5, the data for direction followed

a very similar critical pattern. Women represented 27% of the professionals directing a production

but directed 22% of the plays, with the percentage for the performances being even lower at just 18%.

Figure 5. Percentage of women considering the number of professionals, plays, and performances.

Women accounted for 27% of the directors but were responsible for 18% of the performances.

Function	N° of Professionals	N° of Plays	N° of Performances
Playwrights	29%	23%	19%
Directors	27%	22%	18%
Producers	52%	49%	46%
Lighting designers	25%	23%	22%
Set designers	36%	34%	31%
Costume designers	57%	58%	52%

These latter figures seem to reproduce the data describing the gender gap previously registered by IBGE. A report launched in 2020, using data from 2019, showed that among those employed in managerial functions, the percentage of women decreased when we considered positions with higher salaries¹³. The data for playwrights and director were particularly worrisome because they referred to the two driving forces behind the theatrical discourse of the ideas and experiences represented to audiences on stage. They reflected an imbalance in the labour market which directly impacted the opportunities women had to express themselves and be heard.

In turn, the analysis of performers required a different approach because the number of professionals involved in each play varied from one actor in

monologues to dozens of people in some musicals, thereby providing multiple combinations of men and women in each production. Thus, analysis of the overall data regarding performances provided a better estimate of a possible imbalance between the opportunities for both genders. Based on the aggregate figures, we registered information about the actors in 1,333 plays corresponding to 13,400 performances (96% of the whole sample). Considering the number of artists playing a character in each of these performances, we calculated that each performer took to the stage a mean 72.44 times. Of these, the performer was a man in 57% of the cases and a woman 43% of the time: results very similar to those observed in our first approach (54% vs. 46%), but once again with a slight shift against women.

Although the mapping did not include information on salaries, ticket sales, grants, or sponsorships, it

13 https://biblioteca.ibge.gov.br/visualizacao/livros/liv101784_informativo.pdf

is reasonable to infer that plays with more performances were likely to be in a better position to pay higher salaries. This is because these plays probably had larger audiences and, potentially, more grants and/or sponsorships. Given that the participation of women in all seven functions analysed here was clearly lower than that of men when considering the number of performances, it was quite likely that men had higher mean earnings than women. Indeed, the IBGE report (2021) indicated that in 2019, on average, female employees received 78% of the mean salary of their male counterparts when the entire labour market was considered.

This would not necessarily occur only because of a gap between the salaries of men and women working in the same kind of production and under the same conditions, which is a problem frequently mentioned in other professions. The information provided by this current mapping study was insufficient to allow us to confirm or rule out this hypothesis, even though this tendency was very likely also present. Nonetheless, there were more male professionals and they had an increased number of performances compared to women, meaning that men had more ‘working days’ than women. This was not only because more men were working in theatre than women, but also because their presence was greater in plays that had more performances. Of note, a similar tendency was also previously found in Spain (Actis, 2016) in a study that confirmed that women were concentrated in the labour market segment that had fewer jobs per day.

This argument is not exclusively valid only for professionals more likely to be paid ‘per performance’ or by the month, but also for those who might be paid by the job, such as set or lighting designers, for example. Plays with more performances are more likely to pay better salaries and/or offer a bonus for a number of performances exceeding a certain baseline. Thus, the earnings of each theatre professional is another example of a topic that should be explored in further studies. Finally, comparison between plays for children and for adults did not

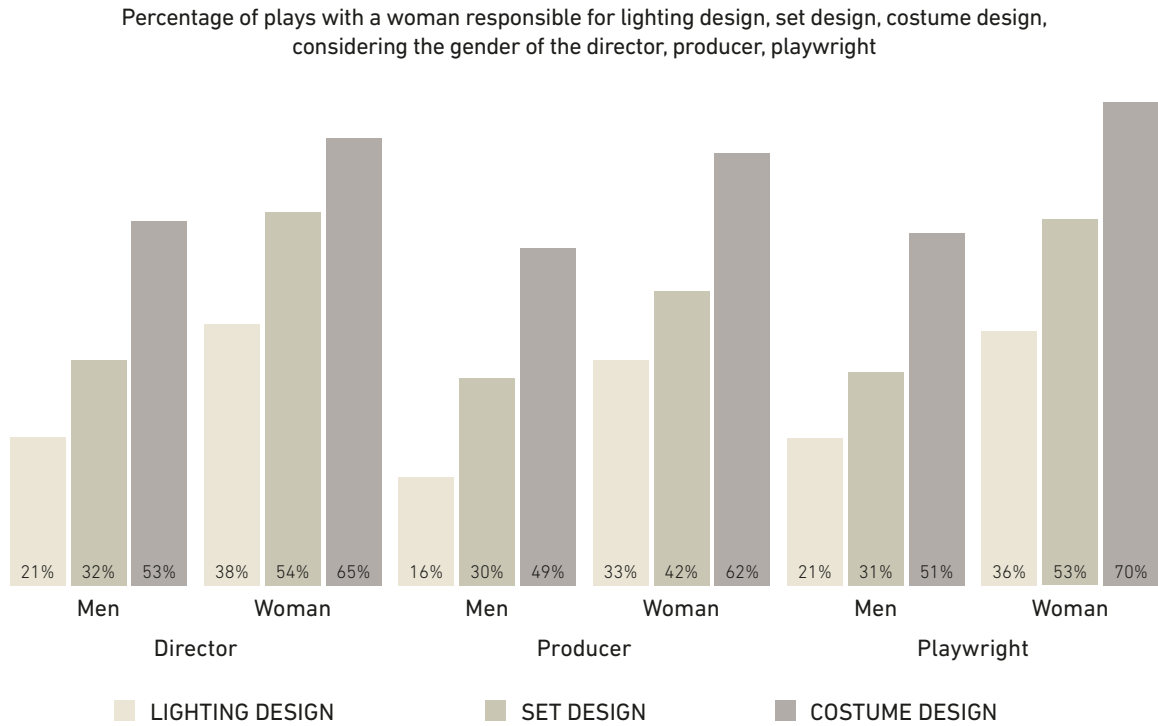
present any meaningful differences in the averages for the three approaches described so far. While this job market was more fragmented (7 performances per play compared to 11 in the case of adult plays), the relative position of women seemed to be quite similar in both genres.

DECISION-MAKING

Gender inequality reduced once women managed to become playwrights, directors, or producers of plays because having a female professional in these functions increased the likelihood of women being used in other relevant positions. However, inequality increased when we examined plays in which these three functions were performed by a male professional. The analysis first considered playwrights, splitting the plays in two groups: one with at least one male playwright and one no female playwrights and the other with the opposite configuration (at least one female playwright and no male playwrights). Given that the process did not consider the authorship of artist collectives and plays written by both a man and a woman, the final sample for each function was slightly different from those adopted in the previous approaches.

The results (see figure 6) showed how having a female playwright, director, or producer implied different patterns of gender distribution in lighting, set, and costume design. For example, 36% of lighting designers were female in these plays compared to 23% in the overall sample. In turn, 53% of the set designers were women compared to only 31% for plays with male playwrights. Finally, considering costume design—a function already dominated by female professionals (58% in the total sample)—the imbalance against men increased so that 70% of production costumes were designed by women. Figure 6 also suggests these changes were higher when the comparison focused on the playwright or director when considering, of course, living playwrights, probably because these professionals have the most power to make decisions.

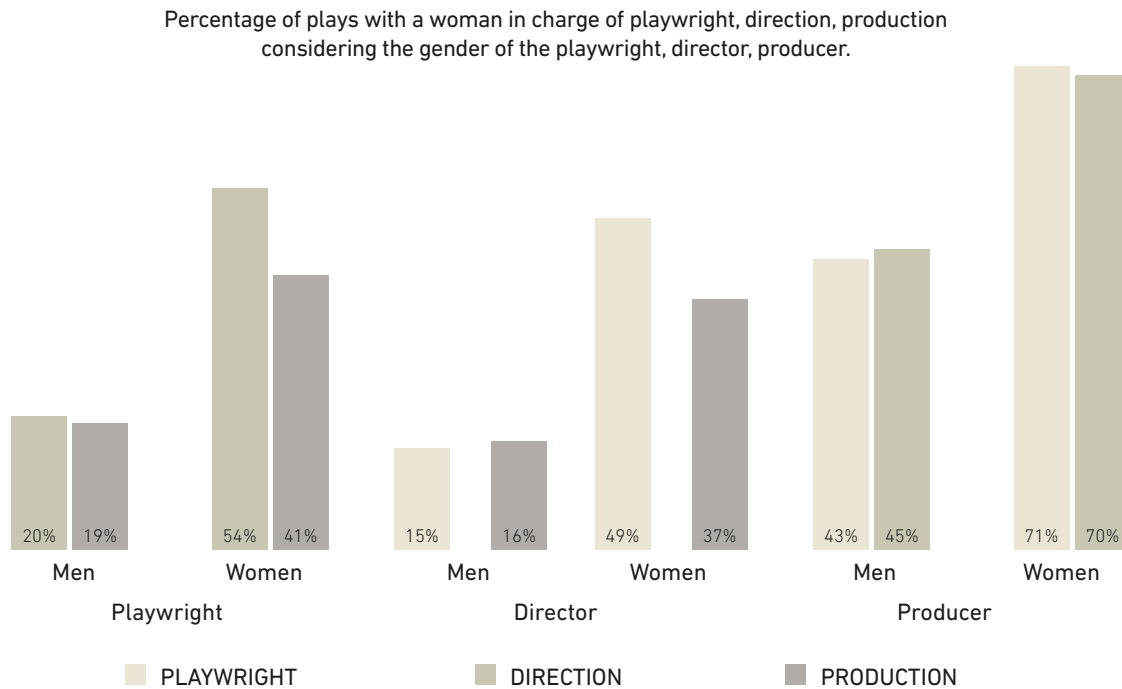
Figure 6. How the gender of the decision-makers impacted the presence of women in technical positions.



The same pattern was seen when we compared only the three key positions, as shown in figure 7. The plays written by at least one man were also directed by a man in 85% of the cases, a percentage even higher than the 78% observed in the overall sample. This additional imbalance towards a ‘male cast’ also happened for the other five functions. However, the pattern was reversed when compared

to the plays written by at least one woman. While a woman directed 15% of the plays written by a man, this percentage more than tripled, to 49%, when considering only plays written by women. The percentage of woman-produced plays, which was 52% in the overall sample and 43% for plays written by men, reached 71% if the play had been written by a woman.

Figure 7. How the gender of one decision-maker impacted the presence of women in the other decision-making positions.



How to read the figure: Among plays with a male playwright, 20% were directed and 19% were produced by a woman. Among those with a female playwright, 54% were directed and 41% were produced by women.

These data show a clear change in gender distribution when a man or woman was in one of these three key positions. However, the interpretation of these results requires some attention because these three functions can interact with each other in multiple ways to influence the ways a theatre production is built. Some hypotheses could help the understanding of the possible dynamics behind the numbers. First, for plays written by deceased authors, the leading position is the director or producer. Considering that most dead playwrights were men (the presence of women is much higher among living playwrights), we can risk saying that the likelihood of someone deciding to restage a play of a dead author is higher among men than among women, regardless of whether the decision comes from a director or producer. This would produce a kind of a ‘Shakespeare effect’ by which men write about men, thereby encouraging more men to stage these texts.

For living authors, the decision to produce a play may come from one of these three key functions. The playwright can invite a director or a producer, or the latter two professionals may look for a text to stage. In some cases, the same professional plays more than one of these functions. These different possibilities define how the decision-making power is distributed among these functions. Only a specific survey and in-depth interviews could clarify how these different processes are articulated, how they are distributed in quantitative terms, and how they influence the gender of the professionals hired for other functions.

The data for producers, which showed almost no gender gap, were a positive indicator for women and are a sign that things could be changing. Once again, the lack of previous data prevents a precise analysis regarding the speed and intensity of this change, and especially of the reasons behind it. An important refer-

ence for this discussion is the fact that this tendency was also found in the audiovisual field. A report from Ancine (2019) showed a similar gender gap pattern to the one seen for theatre. There was a huge gap in women working as directors or screenwriters (22% of the films released in 2018, in both cases) and a strong presence of women as executive producers (43%). In terms of the technical functions, only 15% of the films had a female director of photography, representing a higher imbalance than for lighting designers in theatre (23%). However, the percentage of films with a female art director was quite balanced at 57%. Unfortunately, the report did not explore reasons for these findings that could help interpret our current results.

On one last note, I would like to present a couple hypotheses regarding the strong presence of women as producers that could drive future research. First, their presence could reproduce the stereotype and structural prejudice that touts women as gifted and organised professionals present to assist men, as found in old-school offices and in most executive situations (where the secretary was never a man). Second, it could also have an ‘open door effect’ because, as the interaction between playwrights and directors is stronger, many women can only find opportunities to work as producers.

These two lines of thought question whether this data represents ‘good news’. Indeed, prejudice and obstacles against women in empowered positions would pave the way for female professionals towards production only. Nonetheless, this strategic function would unquestionably drive further changes to mitigate the gender gap. As the data shows, more women-driven productions also equates to a greater likelihood of women being contracted to work in other theatre activities. Furthermore, because the producer can also initiate and construct theatre productions, the presence of more female producers could also increase their presence as future playwrights and directors. In this regard, a report from IBGE (2010) showed that women formed the majority (57%) of students enrolled in arts courses at universities. This

figure supports the open door effect and also indicates that past education and training gaps are being left behind, with increasing pressure to break down barriers and open the doors still closed to women in the theatre job market.

CONCLUSIONS

Theatre production in São Paulo reproduces the gender inequalities registered in the Brazilian labour market as a whole. First, more male than female professionals worked in five of the seven functions we investigated here. According to the IBGE, in 2019, 74% of men were part of the working force, while the percentage was much smaller for women (55%). Second, the gap was higher among decision-makers. While the IBGE registered that men occupied 63% of the management positions, this mapping study showed that a huge majority of plays were written (77%) or directed (78%) by men. Salaries seemed to follow the same tendency, even though this work did not allow financial comparison. The data showed that the percentage of women in one of the seven functions examined decreased when we considered the number of performances, suggesting that men occupied the best positions: plays with more performances.

However, there is an important caveat. The production figures were reasonably balanced between male (48%) and female (52%) professionals, indicating that women have been able to access at least one important role in theatres. After the director and playwright, producers still have a lot of decision-making power and influence the hiring of more female professionals. Comparison of plays produced by men and women showed that when a female professional led the production team, more women were present in the other functions we considered when compared to the plays produced by a male professional.

This trend was even greater when the same analysis was repeated with directors and playwrights, given

that they are the main driving forces inside theatre productions. The critical point being that these are precisely the functions with the lowest likelihood of having a woman in charge. Moreover, these are the key positions from which women could express their viewpoints, talk about their problems, and share their perspectives on the world with audiences. Thus, these key functions do not just represent another ‘job position’ in the ‘theatre market’ but rather, they are a pivotal source of expression and ideas. The labour market gap in playwright and direction positions for women implies a mismatch in opportunities for women to speak and to be heard, which must be urgently addressed.

There is an alarming lack of data about the theatre market in Brazil, which clearly limits the analysis of the results we gathered here in our mapping. There are no historical series nor any institutions producing

systematic quantitative information about theatrical activity in the country. These data could indicate how the overview presented here relates to previous years and how it could develop in the future. Publishing basic data about the plays performed in Brazil could help policy makers to develop evidence-based policies, cultural agents to understand the market they are part of, and cultural institutions to face the main challenges they will meet in their daily activities. All three of these aspects could also help to inform public policies, raise awareness about the gender gap, and develop initiatives to foster the presence of women in the different functions of theatre production. This is particularly important in the current context in Brazil marked by the consequences of the pandemic, lack of government support in cultural fields, and absence of public initiatives to raise awareness about the inequalities faced by women in the theatre job market.

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BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

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