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“I never thought about how much of a juggle it would be”: motherhood and work in contemporary Lithuanian and Irish creative industries

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ABSTRACT

This article explores the experiences of Irish and Lithuanian mothers in creative work who detail challenges they face and the various strategies they develop to sustain creative work and care for their children. The study draws from 24 interviews which were carried out with mothers in both countries at various stages in their careers. Our study stresses the importance of national context in research on European creative workers, since national and localised differences feature little in creative industries literature. By assessing mothers in their national contexts, we argue that mothers may share overall experiences of juggling work and family life, of the requirement to solve childcare issues and of challenges they face while working in creative industries. However, crucially, key differences emerge in how Lithuanian and Irish mothers position their professional and maternal identities. Differences arise in the solutions that Lithuanian and Irish mothers use and in the extent to which challenges may be negated, particularly across generations. We relate each of these differences to the localised contexts in which the creative workers mother.

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Introduction

This article argues that localised socio-economic contexts are important when analysing the experiences of Irish and Lithuanian mothers in creative work. It reports on mothers’ framing of the challenges that arise when balancing work and childcare and on the various strategies mothers develop to be able to sustain creative work while caring for their children. Creative industries (CI) literature and studies of creative workers tend to focus on a small number of large national contexts, mainly the UK, anglophone and northern European contexts. There are limited studies of European nations with small CI sectors where work may be more limited and precarious. This article examines workers who are particularly marginalised, namely, mothers and asks what can be learned from

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examining the experiences of mothers in small European nation CIs. It draws from literature on mothers in anglophone and large nation contexts in order to understand if similar issues emerge in Lithuanian and Irish mothers' experiences of creative work. The established literature points to challenges regarding balancing motherhood in flexible, informal and project-based work (Anne O'Brien 2014; Leung Wing-Fai, Rosalind Gill and Keith Randle 2015; Anne O'Brien, Paraic Kerrigan and Susan Liddy 2023;; Susan Berridge 2021) where mothers experience marginalisation, endless time-pressures, devaluation of their labour and discrimination, all of which suggests that creative industries remain highly unequal despite recent attempts at improving gender representation in such work (Natalie Wreyford 2013; Tamsyn Dent 2016, 2021; Maria Jansson and Louise Wallenberg Louise 2021). Our study finds similar experiences of inequality, exclusion and similar challenges in the experiences of Lithuanian and Irish mothers in creative work but also considers the nuances of localised experiences. We identify three key themes that we contextualise through local socio-economic and historical experiences of motherhood. Firstly, while Lithuanian and Irish mothers have similar experiences of "juggling" creative work and motherhood, there are differences in the extent to which they speak from a maternal or professional positionality reflecting the differential access to employment that women historically had in each nation. Secondly, while Lithuanian and Irish mothers both had to solve the issue of childcare while engaged in creative work, Irish mothers typically "bought" solutions whereas Lithuanian mothers found informal and personal solutions. We relate this to the different provisions of childcare in Lithuania (limited State provision) and Ireland (marketized). Finally, we note generational differences in how mothers reported issues of balancing work and motherhood that spoke to the historical differences in accessibility to work in Ireland and Lithuania. The study draws from 24 interviews in total (12 Irish and 12 Lithuanian) that were carried out with self-identified mothers at various stages in their creative careers. We map the literature specific to mothers in creative work and introduce our case study approach, which explains important localised contexts of Lithuanian and Irish CIs. These include national trends in childcare provision, accessibility to work, and national ideologies of motherhood that shape mothers' experiences. We briefly discuss the different CI structures in both nations and then follow with a discussion of the aforementioned themes. Within each of these themes, we discuss the important local differences in the experiences of Lithuanian and Irish mothers and, in our conclusion, call for more attention to national contexts in which creative work takes place.

Motherhood and creative work

Various studies, mainly UK-focused, and all on the film industry, explore the exclusion of mothers from CIs or addressed challenges mothers face at different times in their life course while trying to sustain careers. The findings of such studies are often particular to their national contexts. For example, some studies focus on consequences of State sanctioned maternity leave, which is available to UK creative workers. Wreyford notes how periods of maternity leave prove problematic for mothers when returning to work (2013) especially when CI recruitment is informalized through networks (Natalie Wreyford 2015, 2018). Dent (2016) explores the devalued position of mothers in UK film work. She notes that the only viable alternative to mothers is

occupational to facilitate caring responsibilities, or complete withdrawal from work (2016, 243). Scholarship on UK CIs also stresses the neoliberalised contexts of motherhood in which it is highly individualised and privatised following the neoliberal turn in work that emerged since the 1980s. Wing-Fai, Gill, and Randle (2015) establish that alongside being made responsible for care work, mothers feel they must bear the burden silently and privately. Further, mothers' testimonials on the UK Raising Film's website reinforce narratives that emphasize self-regulation or self-responsibilisation, and only occasionally critique the structural exclusion of mothers from creative work, but without ever calling for change or accommodations (Susan Berridge 2019, 464). In short, these studies identify important challenges to combining motherhood and creative work but draw upon the specificities of UK political and economic conditions that contribute to sustaining mothers in employment (maternity leave, etc.). We argue that similar localised specificities must be considered and identified in order to address the problem and, ultimately, find solutions that are viable locally and in the wider European context.

In those small nation or non-anglophone studies, findings evidence profound inequalities for mothers in CIs that can intersect with ethnicity and social class. O'Brien and Arnold found that motherhood, in Irish creative work, is perceived as a work problem that mothers themselves must solve (2024). Mayer and Columpar's edited collection *Mothers of Invention: Film, Media, and Caregiving Labor* examines global contexts on screen and in screen industries (2022). O'Brien and Liddy's edited collection *Media Work, Mothers and Motherhood* includes chapters that explain the working experiences of mothers in international CIs (2021). Tijani-Adenle's study of Nigerian broadcast journalism demonstrates how maternity policies and organisational politics combine to exclude pregnant women or those on maternity leave (2021). Likewise, Castano-Echeverri and Correa-González show that mothers face more career challenges than fathers the Colombian audiovisual industries (2021). In Abd Karim's study Malaysian TV production Muslim women's ethnic and maternal status combined to exacerbate inequalities and exclusion from media work (2021). Ultimately, then, while the scholarship on motherhoods in CI work varies by national context, there is consensus that the experience of motherhood impacts those in CI work more generally (albeit influenced by local conditions).

Efforts to tackle maternal inequalities in CIs have prompted collaboration between academic and industry. Raising Films, for example, researchers mother's experiences of film work throughout the UK (2016, 2021), Australia (Sheree Sheree K Gregory and Deb Verhoeven 2021), and Ireland (2022). Raising Film's data has informed directly or indirectly policies on Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) that many CI organisation, for example, regarding maternity and parental policies. Kerrigan, Liddy and O'Brien document various EDI initiatives in larger CI organisations like the BFI, BBC and the South Australian Film Corporation (2022). Their study of international and local EDI policy implementation demonstrates CI sectors' commitment to addressing inequalities (Susan Liddy, Páraic Kerrigan and Anne O'Brien 2023; Páraic Kerrigan, Liddy, S Susan and A O'Brien 2022) However, resistance to EDI efforts in some locations has been observed, for example, in Sweden and Spain where gender quotas in the film industry faced opposition (Maria Jansson and Orianna Calderón-Sandoval 2022). Further, motherhood remains fairly invisible in wider CI EDI policies in CIs particularly regarding how the structures and working arrangements of CIs perpetuate exclusion for those with caring responsibilities (Anne

O'Brien and Sarah Arnold 2024). Our study shows how EDI discourse in CIs are at variance with the persistence challenges mothers experience in both Lithuanian and Irish contexts.

Methods

The methodological approach is a comparative case study that contrasts the experiences of mothers in creative work in two small European nation states with small CIs. We discuss nuances that tend to be overlooked in large nation CI studies. We emphasise through our comparison, the importance of including a wider sample of national contexts beyond the UK. Since many CI policies occur at the EU level, we argue for the importance of identifying localised contexts and experiences. Indeed, beyond this study, further comparative studies across European territories with different CI models are warranted. This study explores the contextual factors that shape mothers' experience of the intersection between creative work and motherhood. Focusing on contemporary European CIs, this study adopts a multiple-case approach by examining Lithuanian and Irish cases. Our study finds commonalities and differences in these national cases, furthering understanding beyond anglo-centric contexts. The analytic approach involves a detailed description of the cases and the setting of the cases within contextual conditions (Robert Yin 2003). This case study approach allows for the identification of local conditions and specificities that shape and contribute to the experiences of motherhood in creative work that are important for understanding the broader narrative of European CIs.

Consequently, we detail the national socio-political contexts of motherhood in each nation and then summarise key differences. Until the 1940s Lithuania held a catholic-conservative approach that positioned mothers as devoted housewives, despite working while mothering (Giedrė Purvaneckienė 1998, 50). After Soviet occupation, patriarchal norms continued to exist, in a model whereby all citizens the right but also the obligation to work (Claus Offe 1996). For mothers, had a "dual burden" of work combined with childcare, compounded by an absence of gender equality in childcare despite Soviet State claims to the contrary (Herwig Reiter 2010, 532). Mothers struggled due to limited childcare provision and scarcity of paid work (Dalia Leinartė 2022, 194). By the 1990s, the democratization of society and declines in State-based employment were felt by women who continued to have this "dual burden." "In the course of the transformation of the regime, the 'double burden' of motherhood and employment has transformed into a 'double uncertainty' with regard to both care and work" (Reiter 2010, 547).

More recently, Lithuania ranks highly for paid job-protected for mothers, but affordable and available early childcare education is limited (Unicef 2021). Scholars note limited affordable childcare services, and flexible working arrangements for returning mothers (Jolanta Reingardė and Tereškinas Arturas 2006; Kristina Senkuvienė 2018; Vlada Stankuniene and Domantas Jasilionis 2009). Governmental policy and financial support systems incentivise long maternal leave, and early returners may face economic and structural obstacles which are expected to be solved individually. Further, compared to other Baltic countries Lithuania is distinct for inconsistency in family policies, which are very dependent on the ruling political parties of the day (Stankuniene and Jasilionis 2009; Laimutė Žalimienė 2015).

In Ireland, gender inequality in the workplace is entrenched, because of historical idealisation of women's domestic role and past policies like the civil service "marriage

bar” which ceased in the 1970s, along with a Catholic patriarchal society (Josephine Donovan 2000). Currently women face the ongoing challenges of gender segregation in roles, a gender pay gap and limited access to workplace decision-making roles (NWCI 2015). Motherhood-related breaks result in income loss and loss of earnings (Helen Russell, Frances Frances McGinnity, Éamonn Éamonn Fahey and Oona Oona Kenny 2018, 1). Ireland has a “maximum private responsibility” model of childcare where problems such as care work, family life and labour force participation are “problems” for women to solve (OECD 1990; Sara O’Sullivan 2012, 225). Byrne-Doran notes the centrality of “traditional and dichotomous thinking of men as providers and women as carers” (in O’Sullivan 2012, 108). Along with poor State supports, Irish “childcare is uncoordinated, variable in quality and the highest cost as a proportion of average earnings in the EU” (Clare O’Hagan 2015, 205).

In summarising Lithuania and Ireland, both place childcare responsibility on mothers, resulting in career penalties. However, there are key differences in mothers’ experiences of creative work. In Lithuania, the catholic ideology of motherhood competes with a political-economic ideology that idealises work and labour. In Ireland, motherhood is expected to be the primary identity. Equally, State policies (or lack of) vary in their impact on mothers who work. Lithuania’s State provision for childcare is in reality difficult to access. Childcare in Ireland is largely marketized and privatised. Historical factors determined employment with Ireland excluding women from, and Lithuania mandating, work. A key question therefore is how these differences play out in CIs in each state.

Defining Creative Industries (CIs)

In the cases of Ireland and Lithuania there are some commonalities and some differences between the structure of each nation’s CI sector. We briefly detail CI policy in each national context below before summarising key differences. Discussions of CIs in Ireland first appeared in national policy in 2008 and continued through the subsequent decades, with CIs positioned as vehicles for economic growth (Department of An Taoiseach 2008; Department of Arts Heritage and the Gaeltacht 2016, 2). Irish CIs are often vaguely defined, encompassing arts, culture, heritage and, increasingly digital technology (Ireland. Houses of the Oireachtas 2017). Despite plans for a national CIs roadmap aimed at generating economic growth and labour market participation (Creative Ireland 2022) no plans have been published to date by the Irish government. Moreover, the number of people employed in the sector in Ireland is “50,000 [and] is lower than that of other EU countries and represent(s) only about three per cent of total Irish employment” (Frank Crowley 2017). Within various CI subsectors, there has been a focus on EDI and improving the representation of women and minoritised groups in CI work including: Screen Ireland’s 6-Point Gender Action Plan (2025); Broadcasting Authority of Ireland’s Gender Action Plan (2018); and national broadcaster RTÉ’s Diversity and Inclusion Charter (2018). However, despite policies and initiatives there remains a scarcity of work, precarious working conditions and contracts, and structural barriers to entry and sustainment of work.

Discussions of the creative industries in Lithuania began in the late 90’s and early 2000s when the notion of cultural industries first appeared in official cultural policy documents (Compendium Cultural Policies and Trends 2019). While the UK CI

Table 1. Study participants.

Pseudonym	Sector	Role	No. of children	Ages	Marital status	Employment status	Country
Rachel	Television	Producer	2	5+	married	employed	Ire
Jane	Television	Producer/ Production Manager	2	5+	married	employed	Ire
Marie	Documentary	Producer	1	–5	partner	self employed	Ire
Sharon	Documentary	Editor	2	–5	married	self employed	Ire
Grainne	Television/film	Editor	2	10+	Divorced	self employed	Ire
Roisin	Television	Producer	1	10+	Divorced	self employed	Ire
Dervla	Film	Director	2	20+	married	self employed	Ire
Bronagh	Television	Editor	2	10+	married	self employed	Ire
Kate	Television	Producer	2	10+	married	IPC	Ire
Emma	Television	Producer	2	–5	partner	IPC	Ire
Fiona	Film	Art Department	1	10+	married	self employed	Ire
Irene	Film	Director	4	18+	married	self employed	Ire
Annike	Film	Director	2	18+	married	self employed	LT
Justina	Fim	Head of a film festival	2	18+	married	self employed	LT
Lina	Film, TV, advertising, performing arts	Costume Designer	2	18+	married	self employed	LT
Biruta	Film, TV, advertising	Producer, programmer	1	18+	married	self employed	LT
Lėja	Film	producer	2	+5	married		LT
Kamilė	Film	Cinematographer	2	–5; 5+	married		LT
Egle	Film	Costume designer	0	-	married		LT
Daiva	Film	Director	3	5+; 10 +; 18+	married		LT
Margarita	Film/TV	Director, Scriptwriter	2	–5; 5+	married		LT
Giedra	Film	Programmer	1	18+	divorced		LT
Jurga	Film, TV	Producer	1	10+	partner		LT
Violeta	Film	Producer	3	5+	married	self employed	LT

definition was adopted (Jūratė Černevičiūtė 2011), there was less focus on the economic contribution (Eglė Rindzevičiūtė, Jenny Svensson and Klara Tomson 2016). Subsequently, various initiatives and projects have aimed to develop arts incubators, boost local economies and upskill the labour force (Compendium Cultural Policies and Trends 2019; OECD 2022; Vilnius Academy of the Arts 2014). This approach culminates in the national long-term strategy “Lithuania 2030,” which aims to promote the cultural and creative industries. By 2020 CIs featured as key concerns in the National Development Plan for Lithuania 2021–2030 (Compendium Cultural Policies and Trends 2019). A recent focus on gender equality is evident in initiatives led the Lithuanian Film Centre (LFC), which collaborated with the European Women’s Audiovisual Network to create activities and opportunities promoting gender equality in the audiovisual sectors (2020). The LFC has proven a key driver of gender equality for example, publishing recommendations for industry on equality and inclusion (2019). Perhaps the LFC’s work is necessary because the wider audiovisual industries have not yet advanced gender equality policies.

In both cases, State attention to CIs is relatively recent, with vague and broad definitions in State policies. Irish CI policy emphasises the economic contribution of CIs whereas Lithuanian CI policy, initially less focused on economic growth has reoriented in that direction. In Ireland, an oversupply of creative workers and an undersupply of work makes

creative work highly competitive. Finally, State-led policies address gender inequality in Irish CIs, whereas, in Lithuania, these are driven by non-State organisations.

The following [Table 1](#) represents the respondents' nationality, parental status, sector, work role, employment status (where it was disclosed) and age of children.

Findings

Our findings demonstrate commonalities across the experiences of Lithuanian and Irish mothers who report similar challenges negotiating creative work as mothers, with some variation in perceptions and management of such challenges. Three dominant themes emerged in the data. Firstly, in both countries mothers referred to the “juggle and the struggle” derived from the competing demands of motherhood and creative work. Mothers in both countries assumed responsibility for their own personal management of childcare, and this reflects findings elsewhere in which mothers in creative work self-regulate their care-work responsibilities (Berridge 2019; Dent 2021). There was however a subtle difference whereby Lithuanian mothers described their struggle to maintain creative professionalism while Irish mothers focused more on the issue of blurred boundaries between work and home.

Secondly, across both groups, mothers tended to individualise and self-responsibilise their care work burden, viewing pregnancy as a personal challenge to overcome. They continued to work during maternity leave and blamed themselves if they did not manage their work and care responsibilities effectively. While mothers' self-responsibilisation is often taken as evidence of a neoliberalised subjectivity (Natalie Wreyford 2018; Berridge 2021; O'Brien and Arnold 2024), we found differences in the extent to which Lithuanian and Irish mothers saw the care burden as a personal responsibility. Lithuanian mothers were more emphatic in self-responsibilising and Irish mothers were more inclined to attribute care challenges to structural inequalities. This may reflect the differing public attitudes to care provision in each country. In Lithuania, public discourses of affordable childcare contrasts with a reality of inadequate State provisions of care. In Ireland, where minimal State provision is the norm, public discourse speaks mainly to the expense of accessing private care. Thus, while Irish mothers saw State-provided childcare as a solution, Lithuanian mothers, accustomed to the compromised “benefit” of supposedly available State care, did not see this as a realistic solution.

Finally, intergenerational differences were observed among mothers in Lithuania and Ireland regarding combining creative work with care work. Older and/or more advanced in their careers reported fewer problems with work-family balance, compared to early career and younger mothers, partly explained by the less intense care needs of children as they age. However, this also underscores intensified pressures on mothers in both countries to balance work and care while taking individual responsibility for both roles and also optimising performance at work. Yet there is limited research explores differences across time and age beyond a small number of studies of women's film work that identifies inequalities among younger workers (Lina Kaminskaitė-Jančorienė and Jelena Šalaj 2021). The three findings discussed next underscore gaps in understanding mothers who work in CIs in Europe. Existing CI literature is based on the UK context, thus necessitating research on how European CIs replicate or ameliorate problems of inclusion

and quality of work identified in UK research. Comparative studies that explore the mothers' inclusion in or exclusion from CIs are lacking. While this study addresses these gaps in two small peripheral EU states, it highlights the lacunae in knowledge about CIs in large EU states and their current approach to work and inclusion. The paper now turns to the findings of our comparison.

The juggle and the struggle

Mothers in CIs navigate work-family balance through “coping” (Jansson and Louise 2021), “negotiation” (Alejandra Castano-Echeverri and Correa-González Andrés 2021; Berridge 2021), “stigma” (Dent 2021), “adaptation” (Susan Liddy, Páraic Kerrigan, and Anne O'Brien 2023), career disadvantage (Wreyford 2013) and the incompatibility of motherhood and creative work (O'Brien 2014). Describing their experience as “the juggle and the struggle,” the mothers in this study spoke of a perpetual need to schedule, organise, negotiate and renegotiate their work and home lives. The persistent use of the word “juggle” suggested that the mothers knew how precarious and fraught this search for a work-family balance was and their descriptions of the juggle implied that it was an additional workload for them.

The Irish mothers' juggle was associated with time-pressures and the blurring of work and home boundaries. Rachel (Ire) spoke of how the workday crept into her home life even after years of working CIs: “it is still . . . a juggle. You get home in the evenings and you have to start doing the homework.” Sharon (Ire) juggled with time pressures, as well as the logistics of childcare and the management of children's illness.

I never thought about how much of a juggle it would be or . . . how much it eats into either end of your day as well . . . you're kind of thinking of drop off and pick up and getting stuff ready and then juggling when they're sick. (Sharon [Ire])

Rachel (Ire) “juggle[d] the family life and all of that” by working a six-day week to balance her home and work commitments.

Lithuanian mothers, like Irish mothers, found the boundary between work and family difficult to maintain. Their juggle, however, was associated with maintaining professionalism while mothering successfully. Justina (Lith) stressed “But you still need to find that magical formula—how to maintain your competence there [at work]. . . and to keep that good position both with the kids and with work tasks.” Kamilė (Lith), remembering an instance when her child was crying with hunger on set, said “If you want to have a good shot, you shouldn't be thinking that your hungry child is waiting.” Margarita (Lith) remembered being upset during an important work project because her child would misbehave for attention. In this situation, Margarita struggled to compartmentalise her work, feeling guilty that her time away at work was a catalyst for her child's misbehaviour.

The mothers' juggle and the struggle was especially challenging in project-based work like film production. The demands of this work often necessitated long days away from family, placing responsibility on mothers to manage their family life during their absence. Mothers in both countries described creative sector that were inflexible to their needs, forcing them to negotiate challenging work circumstances individually. Irish mothers described their constant transition from work to mothering to work as shift work, leaving them working long into the night. Fiona (Ire) described long working days punctuated by

childcare and work responsibilities. She described taking “a proper lunch break” from work “to go and pick up [the children].” Lithuanian mothers, on the other hand, endured unreasonable hours even during pregnancy and labour, with employers indifferent to the reality of maternal and reproductive bodies. Margarita (Lith) spoke of going abroad for a shoot while seven months pregnant. She, likewise, related a story of giving birth while working as a scriptwriter. On the day that she gave birth and while she was still in the maternity hospital, she received a call from a producer telling her to complete a piece of work for him. She stated, with some regret, that she did the work: “and I did that, can you imagine?,” emphasising the extreme juggle she had to undertake in this instance. Overall, Lithuanian and Irish mothers’ responses depicted ill-equipped to accommodate maternal life and maternal bodies. Moreover, it was difficult for the mothers to address such a large issue and, instead, they were left to individualise a solutions.

Mothers’ solution to the problem of the juggle was often found in familial or professional childcare supports. Scholarship on mothers in CIs has evidenced a correlation between inadequate childcare supports and early exit from the sector (Wreyford 2013; Dent 2016). Equally, sourcing childcare becomes an additional “role” that mothers undertake while in creative work when there are few State or organisational childcare supports and facilities available at no or low cost (McRobbie 2018; Susan Liddy, Páraic Kerrigan, and Anne O’Brien 2023). In the case of Lithuania and Ireland, differences in State provision, employment law and attitudes to the family were apparent and framed how mothers approached childcare solutions. Yet, the same issue of maternal responsabilisation of childcare was apparent.

The management of the juggle was facilitated for Lithuanian and Irish mothers if they had a partner or an extended care network to rely upon. Both Irish and Lithuanian mothers emphasised the crucial role of these care supports in sustaining their careers, with one Irish mother stating that if the childminder quits, “I’ll also be quitting [work] because she is part of the glue that makes it all work.” (Rachel [Ire]) Sharon, also Irish, stated that, without her parents providing childcare “I wouldn’t have been able to really work.” These mothers were relieved and grateful for the supports provided by partners and family, as was the case for many of the Lithuanian mothers. However, Irish mothers more commonly sought informal or semi-formal care outside of the family such as childminders, babysitters or Au Pairs. Irene (Ire), for example, stated that “I have had a lot of Au Pairs over the years.” Marie (Ire) spoke of the challenges of sourcing formal childcare: “we started looking at creches when [their child] was in the first six months . . . places weren’t easily available . . . We have a minder who we pay a lot of money but, you know, it gives us great flexibility and comfort.” Ultimately, then, care provisions for both Lithuanian and Irish mothers were largely informal and individualised, with mothers responsible for securing care. In sum, both experienced the “juggle and the struggle,” with Lithuanian mothers articulating more of a struggle to maintain creative professionalism while Irish mothers struggled with work-home boundaries. Moreover, both countries also expected women to individually come up with solutions to the challenge of caring and working.

Individualising the problem

The problem of the juggle and the struggle was often individualised and mothers in both countries viewed childcare and work-life balance as personal rather than structural issues

and as mothers' personal responsibility to solve. There were differences in terms of where mothers sought solutions, with Irish mothers more likely to approach employers and Lithuanian mothers more anxious about posing their motherhood "problem" to employers. Mothers often took on personal responsibility for pregnancy, maternity leave and return to work. Most mothers tried to ensure that pregnancy did not interfere with work; "I worked up until I was about seven months on my first, with both of them actually. And everybody was really supportive. And they'd actually be giving out to me saying you can't lift that, and you can't push that and I'm like, don't you tell me what I can do?" (Irene [Ire]). Some mothers felt wholly responsible for the "impact" of their pregnancy on work: "You feel a little guilty because you will let others down" (Lėja [Lith]). Further, mothers self-responsibilised their maternity leave. Some continued to work while on maternity leave. Often mothers felt they had no other options but to do so:

I worked extremely hard up to, up to the point of burn out. Literally, I think, I stopped working (ten days before the birth) ... I took the six months... the week after she was born I was making payments and transactions. (Marie [Ire])

Even if mothers resented the need to work during maternity leave, they still felt they had to resolve the situation on their own: "Nobody gives a shit... they're all obsessed by themselves, they don't hear... I have a baby here, you know. So then, yeah, so I was sort of, I was still kind of working but just being on maternity leave" (Roisin [Ire]).

There were instances when women, especially Irish women, who became mothers asked for more accommodations in work, with one mother describing. "I worked it that the (second) editor would come up once a week. So, we do it in turns. This did cost the production more... so that's how I negotiated. But again, I was able to" (Emma [Ire]). Often such solutions were initiated by mothers themselves and they felt that their solutions caused inconveniences for their team and colleagues.

This situation changed little as children were growing. Most of the responsibility rested on the shoulders of the mothers in both countries. Some women found this responsibility exhausting. Annike (Lith), for example, detailed how she initially imagined a life free from responsibilities but was not able to have this, given her profession. She listed the broad range of responsibilities she had:

My husband was not at home, he would leave for long periods of time. So, I learned to be the accountant, the engineer, knew how to repair the irons, TV, to drive ... because no one else would do it for me. (Annike [Lith])

Interestingly, some women suggested that women themselves were their own barrier to creative careers, choosing less challenging roles to accommodate motherhood. Irene (Ire) suggested that women themselves create career obstacles: "women stop themselves from moving on in their career, because they're presuming, well, I might want children someday, then, so I don't want any sort of responsible job that will stop me from doing that." While much literature focuses on structural inequalities and exclusionary cultures that limit women's creative career opportunities, a few studies suggest that women accept the view that motherhood is just not compatible with many roles in CIs (Deborah Jones and Judith K Pringle 2015; Kathryn Ellis 2021; Shlomit Aharoni Lir and Liat Ayalon 2023). For Lithuanian and Irish mothers who strove to sustain work, solutions included assistance from relatives, hired help, work in the evenings, or workload

reduction. Ultimately, all their solutions were based on the attitude that it was the mothers' role to "solve the problem" of childcare.

Women felt that work must be done and that mothering needed to fit around work: "The job needs to get done. Whether you've children at home on their own or not" (Bronagh [Ire]). They developed strategies like covert communication at work to manage family life: "But I think you adapt, and you're just able to send the sneaky text under the desk if need be, or take the call, or suddenly you need to go to the loo and you're actually on the phone" (Bronagh [Ire]). Inability to coordinate work and family needs was evaluated as a personal failure. "I don't know, are my problems personal? I am always worried that they're just symptomatic of my own personal failures rather than a societal thing" (Kate [Ire]). Some saw childless creative workers as competitors ever ready to take one's place: "You need to hang on to what you have, [your] position has to be smartly protected, because if you relax—then very easily you will be replaced by others who have time" (Lėja [Lith]).

Yet, Irish and Lithuanian mothers differed in the extent to which they included employers in childcare solutions. In Ireland, childcare and work coordination was more often openly discussed, with mothers more likely to raise the issue with employers, even if she was expected to find a solution for the employer. Irene (Ire), for example, stated "The job is yours, sort it out" meaning that mothers should approach employers with proposals for managing their childcare needs. In Lithuania, mothers were less likely to approach employers about childcare solutions since they felt employers would see them as unemployable. Justina (Lith), for example, said "I gave birth, as usual they let me go on maternity leave and employed a new person. They said for sure, I won't be able to come back with two children as children get sick." She still came back to the role against the expectation of her employer.

In sum, Lithuanian and Irish mothers shared a tendency to individualise the "problem" of mothering in CIs, seeking individual solutions and feeling guilt about unsuccessful work-family coordination. Yet, key differences emerged. Lithuanian mothers a stronger sense of personal responsibility than Irish mothers. While mothers in both countries were primarily responsible for childcare and work coordination, Irish mothers were more likely to involve employers in discussions about these issues. In Lithuania, solutions were highly informal and often sought outside official channels. Finally, challenges varied for mothers at different life stages, as described below.

Intergenerational difference in ideology of motherhood

Differences among women's accounts of mothering and being in creative work were broadly aligned with the mothers' age, their time spent in CIs and their children's ages. While there is little scholarship on generational differences among mothers in CIs, broader literature suggests that consideration of generation and age is important since women's experiences of gender, women's rights, feminism and their own internalised sense of motherhood may be age-related as well as determined by variables such as class, race and location (Jane Pilcher 2017). Although most of the Lithuanian and Irish mothers in this study regarded the compatibility of motherhood and work as challenging, some mothers, particularly Lithuanian filmmaking mothers, rejected this idea. This denial points to the different ideologies of motherhood that operate across different countries and

generations. One of the most frequently recurring themes to emerge from these Lithuanian mothers was that the birth of their children was not a problem at work. For example, Biruta (Lith), recalled that she had worked throughout her pregnancy, and returned to the set with her baby—breastfeeding the baby when needed—ten days following the birth, “This didn’t interfere with my career at all. On the contrary, this was one of the best times.” Biruta (Lith) was happy to continue working, however, the lack of maternity leave in Lithuania meant that she had little choice but to combine breastfeeding and work. Justina (Lith), likewise, did not see any problems:

While working in cinema, I gave birth to . . . to the second child, and that’s not a problem. If a person wants to work – they say that employers are afraid of young women etc. – it’s not a problem, everything works out. (Justina [Lith])

The tendency to negate the challenges related to combining maternity with work could stem from a concern with highlighting gender-related vulnerabilities in mothers’ professional careers. Motherhood, related as it is to the body and a woman’s reproductivity, may be perceived as suggesting a gender vulnerability, especially in work settings. Acknowledging these challenges of the compatibility of maternity and creative work could entail recognising the gender dynamics in one’s work life. Previous research on women in the Lithuanian film industry has found a similar pattern whereby the majority of the older generation women (in the study), differed from their younger colleagues by denying the impact of gender on work (Kaminskaitė-Jančorienė and Šalaj 2021). Such denial of gender and maternity challenges may reflect mothers’ adaptation to patriarchal norms, where perceived feminine “weaknesses” are unwelcome. However, while the mothers interviewed for this study did not deny that the burden of childcare fell to them, the very fact that they negated the challenges of that situation signals a defensive strategy in which they were inclined to focus on their strengths (I can be both a good employee and a good mother), thus reshaping the preconceived expectation of themselves as working mothers when the priority is given to family rather than professional duties.

Contrary to the Lithuanian respondents, the later life stage Irish mothers tended to problematize rather than negate the challenges of motherhood and work balance, and noted that it was others (employers, wider society) that saw motherhood as incompatible with creative work. Irene (Ire) said that people assumed that she was not a mother because her workload was so high: “I think I just got more and more work. And most people didn’t even realise I had a child because they couldn’t believe that somebody would be at work. You know?.” Dervla (Ire) also spoke about colleagues who thought that, once she became a mother, that’s all she would be good at:

I think that where we . . . tend to [go wrong] is this idea that well, because women can do this amazing thing, that must be the only thing that they can do. [. . .]So I think . . . that’s the dichotomy that kind of gets projected onto us going well, “you can do this extraordinary magical thing so that must be your job.” [T]hat’s not true. (Dervla [Ire])

Denying the challenge of combining motherhood and work was more apparent in the Lithuanian mothers’ responses. Some Irish mothers, instead, saw the challenge of motherhood and work as externally produced, e.g., emerging from the biases others had about mothers’ ability to combine work and motherhood.

In sum, the findings are that mothers in both states experience a “juggle and struggle” when it comes to combining creative work with motherhood, but this is inflected with subtly different logics in both cases.

Lithuanian mothers articulated a struggle to maintain creative professionalism while Irish mothers articulated a struggle with blurred boundaries between work and home. Similarly, both Lithuanian and Irish mothers individualised the care burden, but Lithuanian mothers did this more than Irish mothers who were more inclined to factor in structural inequality as a feature of care availability. Finally, there were intergenerational differences in both countries in how mothers viewed combining creative work with care, which speaks to the intensification of this challenge in recent decades and the fact that it will become more rather than less of a problem in coming years.

Conclusion

This article argues that Irish and Lithuanian mothers in creative work faced similar challenges, echoing other mainly UK-based studies of mothers in creative work. These studies also find that childcare and its management fall mainly on mothers (Berridge 2021; Dent 2021; O'Brien and Liddy 2021). Motherhood is often experienced as a penalty that mothers seek to overcome through their “double-jobbing” of childcare coordination and creative work, which creates a significant emotional and cognitive burden for mothers (O'Brien 2014). Likewise, this study's mothers also self-responsibilised and individualised the balance of work and family. Our research did identify some further concerns, namely, that there are important intergenerational differences in how mothers experience motherhood in creative work, with more established and “senior” mothers tending towards problem negation and younger mothers more likely to name motherhood as an issue in their working lives. Moreover, the comparative nature of this study emphasises the need for localisation of motherhood experiences in scholarship on creative work. This includes identifying specific local attitudes to family and the dominant ideologies of motherhood that shape macro-level State policies and micro-level working conditions of mothers. We also stress the importance of understanding how the State approaches motherhood and parenthood through its constitution, laws, policies and welfare system all of which have implications on mothers ability to seek and sustain work. Understanding how CIs are structured and organised also allows for more nuance in the comparison of mothers' experience of creative work. For example, State supports for CIs in some locations may be linked to gender equality and EDI policies but not in others, and in the context of EU gender equality ambitions. Combining creative work and motherhood is, in both Lithuania and Ireland, a problem for mothers themselves to solve, but how they ultimately tackle that (or not) must be understood in relation to the national contexts in which they mother and work.

The study is subject to some limitations, particularly limited geographical range and a small sample size. The relatively small number of interviewees limited the extent to which any generalisations can be made. A larger and more purposeful sample of mothers of different ages and in different career roles and at various career stages would allow for an even more nuanced understanding of some of the issues discovered here, such as that of intergenerational differences in how mothers experience creative work while mothering. Moreover, we report on two small, peripheral, EU

nation states that have some similarities regarding the size of each nation's population, the role of women and mothers in society and in the status of creative industries as agents of economic growth. Extending the study to larger states with different forms of creative industries would facilitate increased understanding of how mothers fare more broadly in the European context and in a broader range of creative sectors. Nevertheless the study does highlight the clear need for further comparative work in this area. This is important given a trend towards economic, social and policy harmonisation related to creative industries and to gender in Europe. Further comparative studies of the localised experiences of mothers in creative work across different national contexts may yield richer insights into the issues raised here and allow for an assessment of the challenge of combining creative work with mothering is for people in a broad European context and may act as an evidence base for effective interventions towards greater equality in European creative work in the future.

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