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Research and Training Network – „Women in European Universities”

1. Research topic

The future and the development of the European systems of higher education are both the subject of national debate and high on the European political agenda. While differences between the European systems of higher education must not be passed over, common trends are discernible in the form of the internationalisation of European research structures and an increasing awareness of the need to render European science systems more competitive.

At the same time, a central challenge that European societies are facing is the question of gender equity in society. The realisation of a concept of non-gendered citizenship, the equal participation of women at all societal levels, is a task that must be recognised and tackled as an issue of paramount importance within the European societies. Its normative dimension has been translated by the political organs of the European Union into the concept of equal opportunity policies, and the European Commission's intention to encourage the participation of women in European research is reflected in its 1999 „Women and Science” communication. Thus the progressive integration of the European research labour market can only be effected if women are integrally included in this undertaking. Apart from the political dimension of this demand, women's equal participation is an imperative of socio-economic progress. Both the potential of human resources that women represent and their specific management skills make their equal participation at all levels of the research system necessary.

Against this background, the research will deal with the professional si-

tuated aspects of European universities are rare, and systematic comparative investigations in this field do not exist. The research will thus meet the existing need for further research by providing a European statistical profile of women in positions of authority, by giving examples of „European best practice” through the identification of universities that have realised gender equity to a high extent, and by carrying out an investigation on the organisational level that will systematically analyse the gendered aspects of organisational culture. The research will be carried out using a mixed model of quantitative and qualitative methods.

2. Research Objectives

The research project „Women in European Universities” assesses systematically and comparatively the professional situation of women in European academia in order to promote the competitiveness of European universities, and to advance the concept of a non-gendered citizenship.

More specifically, the project has three major objectives:

- Firstly, to investigate whether career patterns in European academia rooted in the different systems of higher education are constituting administrative and structural opportunities or barriers to the appointment of women in positions of authority in European universities.
- Secondly to analyse whether specific organisational cultures embedded in the history and internal decision-making processes of European universities comprise embodying organisational opportunity structures or obstacles to the professional advancement of women in academia.
- Thirdly, to research whether affirmative action concepts in the participating countries have led to an effective promotion of women in positions of authority at European universities.

The Project's design consists of inter-related components of analysis that are jointly and successively addressed by seven research teams taking a

strictly comparative approach which combines quantitative and qualitative methods of social sciences. With regard to the career advancement of the participating young researchers (doctoral candidates), the project is scheduled for a three-year period.

In the following, the research objectives of the components are characterized in detail:

- The network works out a synopsis of systems of higher education in Europe focusing on two aspects 1) the professional status of women, 2) the effectiveness of concepts of affirmative action in European academia.
- Addressing the scarcity of statistics of women in leading positions at the European level, the network provides detailed information on women professors in the participating countries. More specifically, the network generates two statistical profiles: First a seven-country overview of women professors according to subject areas and universities, based on a secondary statistical analysis; second a professional and personal profile of women professors in Europe based on a representative survey (postal inquiry).
- The research teams identify „best practice examples” of universities which are characterised by an outstanding percentage of women holding tenured positions in their departments.
- Researching the working conditions and daily routine of women professors in their departments, the network provides an in-depth organisational analysis of the „best practice examples” that focuses on the topic of organisational culture as an opportunity structure or significant barrier to women’s career advancement and mobility at European Universities.

In summary, the project’s „milestones” are:

- a synopsis of the university systems of seven European countries,
- a statistical overview of women professors according to subject



area and to university in the participating countries,

- a representative profile of women professors taking professional as well as personal aspects into account,
- an in-depth organisational analysis of European universities meeting the EU policy goals of equal opportunity and women participation in positions of authority.

As major breakthrough, the project identifies:

- the system of professional advancement and career development in European academia which serves the realisation of the concept of a non-gendered citizenship best,
- the specific characteristics of administrative structures and organisational culture promoting equal participation of women in European universities.

3. Scientific originality

Within European comparative research dealing with gender issues, the issue of the under-representation of women in universities is a research field that

is in strong need of further inquiry. Comparative studies regarding the professional situation of women in Europe do exist but do not focus on vertical segregation in universities. The most important field of comparative studies dealing with women's labour-market participation in Europe is the analysis of the gendered aspects of welfare systems. These studies show that countries vary in their social, family and labour market policies and that they therefore differ in the extent to which they promote or restrain women's employment (Schunter-Kleemann 1992, Garcia-Ramon/Monk 1996, Lewis 1993, Sainsbury 1994). Thus, various studies have contributed to an explanation of the differences in women's integration into the job market, but they do not account for the vertical segregation in work-places. Another strand of comparative research is studies dealing with the issue of gender and are focussing on issues of vertical segregation in the European Union. However, they deal with the issue on a general labour market level and give a first general survey of the extent to which women are under-represented in the labour markets and try to determine possible causes of this phenomenon (Plantenga/Tijdens 1995, European Commission 1997). Above all, these investigations testify to a strong demand for in-depth research in this area. Comparative studies on women in higher education are few but provide a basis for further investigation. Thus some studies focus on cultural and societal explanations for the gender gap in higher education (Lie 1994) or approach the problem analysing and comparing different concepts of affirmative action and their impact on academic careers (Färber/Henninger 1995, Grimm 1995). Recently, the problem of the under-representation of women in the European universities has been brought into focus: the need to encourage the participation of women in the European science system is increasingly stressed (Rose 1999). First statistical overviews on the situation of women in the academic world show that the under-representation of women at the highest levels of the academic hierar-

chy is a feature of all the European higher education systems, but point out that differences exist between Northern and Southern European countries regarding the number of women in positions of authority (Osborn 1999). All recent studies highlight the need for a systematic European investigation of gender-specific data and reflect the need for comparative in-depth analysis in order to encourage the equal participation of women.

In order to perform such a comparative in-depth analysis, research in the field of systems of higher education is relevant to the research. The importance of the aspect of the internationalisation of the European systems of higher education is reflected by a growing number of comparative European studies (European Commission 1991, European Commission 1993, Gellert 1993, Higher education in Europe 1991) which deal with the various structural models of higher education (Teichler 1990), but which also thematize aspects such as market orientation and competitiveness as significant subjects within the current reform debates (Neave/Van Vught 1993, Frackmann/Maassen 1992). Also, higher education policy becomes increasingly the object of comparative policy analysis (Goedegebuure 1993). At the same time studies of the administrative structures of the various systems (Klostermann 1997) and the elaboration of statistical indicators for the comparative analysis of systems of higher education (Kazemzadeh *et al*/1994) provide a basis for a close examination of the effect of structural factors on the professional chances of academics in Europe. However they do not address gender-specific aspects (List 1994).

In contrast to this neglect of gender-specific aspects of higher education structures, within organisational theory, there is a growing number of studies that focus on gender and organisations and that may serve as a basis for the analysis of gender-specific structures in the university (Acker 1990, Cockburn 1991, Acker 1994, Martin 1994, Alvesson/Due Billing 1997). The examination of organisational culture (Schein 1985,

Martin/Siehl 1983) as a site of organisational beliefs, values and attitudes is central to the analysis of the extent to which organisational structures of the university encourage or frustrate career prospects of women. Studies that link organisational culture and gender can serve as a starting point for that research (Gherardi 1995) and have to be combined with the gender regime theory approach (Connell 1987, Connell 1990) in order to highlight the gendered aspects of organisational structures.

In short, comparative approaches concerning gender issues in an European context have until now only to a very limited degree been extended to the problem of gender-specific vertical segregation in Europe. Particularly the field of the under-representation of women in universities is in strong need of further research. While existing comparative research on European systems of higher education provides a solid basis for such an investigation, its deficiency regarding gender-related aspects calls for the integration of gender-specific analysis, as will be done within the planned research design. The organisational approach will be a valuable means to deepen this analysis.

4. Research Method

The project consists of a systematic statistical and qualitative comparative investigation of the representation of women in positions of authority in European universities, thus providing:

- a synopsis of the university systems,
- a statistical overview of women professors according to subject area and university,
- a representative profile of European women professors taking professional as well as personal aspects into account, and
- an in-depth organisational analysis of European universities meeting the EU policy goals of equal opportunity and female participation in positions of authority.

The Project is based on an interdisciplinary approach applying quantitative and qualitative research techniques to address the lack of gender-specific

statistics as well as the lack of comparative organisational studies focusing on career advancement of women at the EU level.

The comparability of the statistical overview of women professors is based on common definitions which the research teams work out by developing indicators for „university“ as a specific institution of higher education in Europe, and for „professor“ as a position of authority in European universities.

There are two reasons why the network uses quantitative and qualitative research methods to investigate the gender-specific issue of vertical segregation in European universities: Firstly, the identification of a non-gendered university system as the major objective of the study requires an interdisciplinary research design combining quantitative and qualitative research techniques. Secondly, the network aims at guaranteeing a full-scale training programme the various social science techniques for the young researchers participating in the project.

The quantitative and qualitative methods are complementary in that the results of the quantitative statistical analysis – the statistical overview of women professors in European universities and the representative profile of European women professors – serve as a starting point for the qualitative case studies of European universities. Finally, the case studies are methodologically based on studies that focus on organisation and gender, thus linking the organisational culture with the gender regime theory approach. The research project applies the following methods:

Quantitative Methods

- **Quantitative Data Analysis:** The statistical overview of women professors is based on an analysis of data compiled by the national and regional statistical offices as well as the personnel departments of the universities in the participating countries. Compared with a control group of male professors the analysis will cover the development of female participation in positions of authority in the last quarter of the

20th century, and will investigate career patterns with respect to age, marital and family status in different time periods.

- **Representative Survey:** The representative profile of European women professors is generated by a postal inquiry applying the methodology of survey research (sampling, development of a questionnaire, pre-test, data-gathering and data-processing). The data will be analysed using the standard repertoire of statistical tests.

Qualitative Methods

- **Contextual Analysis:** Based on the specific literature, the university system in each country is analysed with special emphasis paid to its history and development, its embeddedness into the policy field of higher education, its recruitment procedures, and its organizational/administrative structures.
- **Case Study:** The organisational analysis includes an overview of the history, the administrative set-up and the decision-making structures of those universities that meet the EU policy goals of equal opportunity. To investigate the obstacles, barriers and opportunities for women professors, interviews structured by an interview questionnaire are conducted with women professors at university departmental level. Colleagues holding positions at different points in the university hierarchy are also interviewed.

5. Work plan

The research design of the project „Women in European Universities“ consists of four interrelated „Work Phases“ of which each addresses two „Work Topics“ broken down in several „Worksteps“. The „Worksteps“ which are successively worked off by the research teams in each country are laid down in six „Field Guides“.

Each „Field Guide“ is the result of the collaborative effort of at least two young researchers working together for about four weeks in one country. Thus, the „Field Guides“ are securing the project's strictly comparative approach; moreover by promoting rese-

arch visits within the network, they intensify the collaboration between the young researchers.

Besides the „Field Guides“, five „Project Meetings“ and four „Work Phase Meetings“ held in Brussels are serving as tools of collaboration. Project and Work Phase Meetings are distinct with respect to their purpose and outlook:

- At „Project Meetings“, the network discusses and further elaborates the contents of the „Field Guides“, thus preparing and structuring the investigations and analysis of the „Work Phases“. With regard to its contents, „Project Meetings“ are organised by the team of young researchers that is in charge of the specific „Field Guide“. Furthermore, „Project Meetings“ are accompanied by „Young Researchers' Training Workshops“ that are geared towards the Worksteps of the particular „Work Phase“. In sum, three Training Workshops are planned.
- At „Work Phase Meetings“ which are terminating each Work Phase, the network discusses the results of the particular phase. Organised by the co-ordinating unit of the network, the Work Phase Meetings serve as a starting point for the generation of the „Work Phase Reports“ which are finalized by the co-ordinating unit.

Collaboration and co-operation within the network is intensified further by a „Work Phase“ related publication strategy. In each „Work Phase“, the network produces „Working Papers“ and a „Work Phase Report“. Whereas the „Working Papers“ are „National Reports“ summarising the results of the „Worksteps“ in each country, the „Work Phase Reports“ are designed as a synopsis of the „Working Papers“ summing up their results from a comparative perspective. In sum, the project generates twenty-two Working Papers, three Work Phase Reports and one Final Report. Moreover, the network organises three conferences:

- A mid-term review meeting between the participants of the network and the Commission (18 months): The purpose of this meeting is 1) to disseminate the results of the first two work phases of the network, 2) to evaluate the design,

organisation and management of the project, and 3) to assess its net-working and training aspects.

- A project conference „Storming the Ivory Tower“ (months 18): Connected in parallel with the mid-term meeting, the conference addresses the topic of career planning of young women researchers.
- A final conference „On the Road to Success“ (months 36): At the final conference, the results of the project are disseminated and presented to a broader public.

Tasks and responsibilities are equally distributed among the research teams:

- In Work Phase 1 (months 1–6), each research team addresses the Work Topics of 1. a contextual analysis focusing on the administrative embeddedness of universities in the policy field of higher education, and 2. a systematic analysis of career patterns, nomination and appointment procedures of professors.
- In Work Phase 2 (months 7–18), each research team works together with the national/regional statistical offices, the personnel departments, the statistical officers of the universities and Eurostat in order to generate a country-specific statistical overview of women professors according to subject areas and universities. Work Topic 2 the representative survey (postal inquiry) of women professors is, however, conducted by a three-country team of Sweden, Poland, and Austria, because these countries' statistical overviews of women professors are less comprehensive and time-consuming. The three-country team is responsible for Field Guide IV: Representative Survey; the team develops the questionnaire covering aspects of career development, personal life-style, professional duties, and family obligations which is sent to 1000 female professors in each country. The addresses of the professors are obtained by random sampling using the information of the statistical overview of women professors in the participating countries according to universities.
- In Work Phase 3 (months 19–30), each teams defines the country-

specific „best practice examples“ of universities in which women are holding a significant share of the tenured positions. Thereafter, each team works out case studies of these seven „Superstars“.

- In Work Phase 4 (months 31–35), each team conducts a comparative analysis of the national reports of Phase 1 to 3. At the Project Meeting, the teams discuss the outline of the final report of the project as well as the program of the final conference.

6. Participants of the project

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