

WOMEN AS A FACTOR OF DEVELOPMENT IN THE 21ST CENTURY?

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Abstract

The 21st century is also called „*the century of women*“ and prognoses rank women’s higher profile (for example, in leading positions) among new development megatrends. The number of women is on the rise. Their influence gets stronger not only in economy and politics but also in culture, media, justice, charity, sport, education or science. The importance and the role of women may be examined also through the prism of conflicts of the current globalisation and multidimensional crises - for example, from the women’s perspective as a way to a more balanced economy and society or when looking for ways to achieve sustainability. “Women’s” or ”men’s” approach to scientific knowledge including economic information, as well as a different perspective of rationality or ethical and moral dimensions of social and economic concepts, social responsibility, etc. are discussed. The paper critically outlines some aspects of the growing importance of women in the above mentioned areas; and not only from a feminist perspective and “anti-discriminatory” oriented concepts but also taking into account counter-arguments warning against negative impacts and artificiality of a number of current trends. A position of women in economic theories including inspiration from a modern and/or post-modern feminist economy is also touched upon.

Key words: feminist economics, discrimination, feminist political economy, global capitalism

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Introduction

For several decades we have been hearing, on a general level, not isolated opinions that the 21st century will also be the “century of women”. “Post-men era” has started and a higher visibility of women belongs to new “megatrends”. Futurists such as J. Naisbitt and P. Aburden see the 1990th in the light of changes related to globalisation with “millennium trends” opening the “gate to the 21st century”. And they rank the “decade of women in leading positions” among ten key development trends (apart from, for example, a triumph of

an individual or a global life style and cultural nationalism) (Naisbitt & Aburdenová, 1992). Various studies bring evidence that in wealthy countries it is girls rather than boys who achieve better results at schools, and women are conferred upon more university degrees than men and hold the majority of new positions. As a result of technological changes the manufacturing industry, a traditional domain of men, has been losing its importance, and the significance of services continues to grow. Demand for manual work is on the decrease and differences between genders in terms of chances to find a job level off. Women are, in the spirit of „womenomics“, declared the most powerful engine of the global growth.

1 Women and Society

A position of women in society has developed in individual cultures. And even though the current Western society officially declares that women have the same position as men, the reality very often differs. This has its historical roots and broader social aspects. The primary cause of differentiation was physical differences and the subsequent division of labour between men and women. A culture and/or established views, values, stereotypes and upbringing play their role. And in many countries of the „Western culture“ women still traditionally maintain a position of children caretakers (e.g., in France, Canada and Austria).

In the prehistoric matriarchal society of hunters and gatherers woman was the mistress of the family. With the ongoing development of military skills, crafts and trade and differentiation of a position in society depending on property men got in the forefront. First states were founded on patriarchate, which was established and reinforced by gradual exclusion of women from important areas of social life. The starting point was a transition from a society composed of families to a centralised community. The centralisation of power was made possible by dividing family communities into more easily controllable family households. The success of newly established states was conditioned by an active impact of the centralised power on society and supported by emergence of masculinist philosophy, which rationalised the origination of a new system. During these societal changes the public and private life became separated from one another. In the ancient society (based on the patriarchal model) women became inferior to men and performed jobs related, in particular, to house maintenance and children upbringing. This role of women was further reinforced in the Middle Ages. Due to the influence of the Catholic Church the participation of women in the medieval power structures dropped down to zero. And until the 19th century it was men who participated in the political or religious power. Only some exceptions are known such as

Cleopatra the VII, a ruler from late Egyptian ancient history. In history, there are, however, also women who realised their political and power ambitions through exercising influence on powerful men of their time, for example, marquise de Pompadour (Šimáček, 2007; Čermák, 2003). It is only Renaissance which brings certain emancipation for women and is able to overcome prejudices of the past centuries. With the start of the Industrial Revolution in the 17th century the economic sector was separated from households, resulting in another shift in a position of women. Women were rid of their financial resources which until then limited their dependence on men. While the activity in the economic area was financially rewarded, household chores remained gratuitous. This problem still endures (Novák, 2001). The Enlightenment brought a more extensive discussion on the rights of women. The 19th century is associated with the beginnings of the feminist movement (suffragettes) and first mass women protests for broader political rights (mainly in the United States and Great Britain) aiming to obtain the right to vote. Women obtained the right to vote in between 1893 and 1979. Czechoslovakia introduced the universal suffrage also for women after WWI. Saudi Arabia remains the only country where women cannot vote on a national level (Čermák, 2003).

The emancipation process still continues, in particular in modern Euro-Atlantic society – but not only there – the position of women gets better. Women are equal to men before the law, they take part in political processes, have access to education and are entitled to equal salary. In spite of that there are certain established stereotypes showing signs of masculinist culture.

The percentage representation of women in legislative bodies is still rather low.¹ For example, in the main institutions of the European Union there is only one woman among the highest representatives (in the Committee of the Regions). In the European Commission, European Parliament, Committee of the Regions and in the Economic and Social Committee the women representation ranges from 21 % to 35 % (ČSÚ, 2011b). In the Czech Republic the proportion of female MPs did not exceed 15-17 % of the total MPs in 1996 - 2000. Women have had the largest representation in the Parliament since the election in May 2010 – they account for 22 % of all those elected. Men considerably prevail over women in the decision-making positions at ministries and at the Office of the Government of the Czech Republic. In the current CR Government there are two women – Karolína Peake, Deputy Prime Minister, and Alena Hanáková, Minister of Culture. There are two female vice-

¹ Exceptions are Scandinavia and Canada with a representation of more than 35 %.

presidents of the Senate of the Czech Republic (ČSÚ, 2011a). Positive discrimination and the introduction of quotas is being discussed (a minimum number of women) both for legislative bodies and in the private sector. There are arguments both for and against such quotas. The Czech Republic with its 22 % of women in the Lower House of the Parliament ranks the 62nd in the world. The Czech Socialist Democratic Party has a quota of 25 %. For comparison, a few examples from Europe: quotas in Germany range between 33 – 50 %, United Kingdom 40 %, Sweden 50 % and there are no quotas introduced in Slovakia (Masarykovy debaty, 2012). When examining the representation of women in the public authority and decision-making processes it is interesting to look into court rooms. In the Czech Republic, there are 1,874 female judges at all levels of the judicial system (only 1,189 male judges). However, for example, at the Supreme Court of the Czech Republic there are only 24 % of women, and 45 % at high courts. At regional and district courts there are, on the contrary, more women than men (ČSÚ, 2011c).

2 Women in Economy

Women in developed countries take an active part in economic life; they have a substantial impact on the majority of purchasing decisions related to food, housing and health care. Women also invest more in future generations. Women gradually become more and more important on globalised markets not only as a labour force but also as consumers, entrepreneurs, managers or investors. Female abilities are to benefit business and the female factor is to strengthen society in general. A higher involvement of women in labour markets should, apart from supporting economic growth, help dealing with a threat of ageing or reduced population. Impacts may, however, be also negative. At random, a lower birth-rate may be mentioned (since the time universities became available to women, female university graduates have shown lower fertility rate than women without a school leaving certificate even though a much higher percentage of women study at schools²), crisis and destruction of traditional relationships and values (including growing concerns about extinction of a traditional family) and many others including problems arising from over-feminised schooling. A failure to use women's potential – as a result of worse education, lower employment rate or lower salaries – is usually, in the above context, not perceived as an optimum allocation of precious economic resources (Sirůček, 2011c).

² It is called a „*population deficit*“ or, more specifically, a „*demographic bankruptcy*“ (Možný, 2011).

Women's involvement in the working process plays an important role in their lives. A traditional working orientation of women was mainly influenced, apart from the Industrial Revolution, by war conflicts of the 20th century. Until then women's employment rate had been low. Currently, the employment rate of women aged 15 to 60 ranges from 35 to 60 % (true for European countries). In the Czech Republic almost 50 % of women aged over 15 are economically active (as compared to 68 % of men). According to the Eurostat data it is as much as 61.5 % of women (78.5 % of men). An average for women within the EU 27 is 64.3 % (77.8 % for men) (ČSÚ, 2011e; ČSÚ, 2011f). According to the Czech Statistical Office there were 92 % of economically active women in 2010. The statistical data shows that Czech women account for 29.3 % of the total number of undertakings (864.4 thousand of people) – an average per quarter of 2010. Employed women include 12.2 % of female entrepreneurs (as compared to 22.0 % of men). Employed women included hardly two per cent of female employers (male employer rate was 5.0 %). The highest percentage of female, as well as male entrepreneurs was in the following areas: professional, scientific and technical activities and real estate business. The third most significant proportion of women entrepreneurs (of all the employed) was seen in finance and insurance business (almost one fifth). Health care and social care were areas with the highest percentage of women both for employees (80 % of women) and entrepreneurs (more than 73 % of women). The lowest percentage of women both among employees (11 % of women) and among entrepreneurs (women accounted for hardly 3 %), was seen in building industry. In spite of declared equality in wages women earn less than men regardless of the level of education. Salaries in both groups grew in proportion to the level of education; however, the median salary for Czech women in 2010 reached only 80.2 % of the level of the median salary of men. Biggest differences were seen in secondary school graduates without school-leaving certificates and in university master's and higher degree graduates. Lowest differences were, on the contrary, seen in secondary school graduates with a school-leaving certificate and in people with post-secondary professional or bachelor's education but also in people with completed elementary education (ČSÚ, 2011d).

Out of developed countries it is the Czech Republic where women's abilities are wasted most. Why is it so? One of the reasons is that the Czech labour market is rigid and little opened to mothers, including mothers – college or university graduates. Caring for children is in the context of traditional views of the family often called „*the killer of women's professional career*“. A reform of pre-school institutions (including a lack of kindergartens, etc.) and flexible forms of work for women, etc. are being discussed. A number of stereotypes

have perhaps been passed on from the time of socialism when women had more tasks to fulfil – apart from an obligation to work they were obligated to care for children. Women's value preferences, in line with the spirit of the time, were subjected to criticism - qualified women became victims of their own propaganda. A professional career is put in the first place while having children means a loss and threat. One of the main social obstacles to being successful on the labour market in a modern society is harmonizing family and a professional career. It is especially so in high and prestigious positions where family duties are not taken into consideration. The issue of the relation between family and a professional career has been incorporated in the legislation of developed countries and at an international level, too (ILO³). Companies may contribute to the harmonization of family and work by introducing flexible forms of employment: part-time job, shared workplace, flexible working hours, working from home, working from home PC or work on-call). Other possibilities are: introducing corporate kindergartens or "children's groups". Other causes are usually wasted women's abilities preventing them from achieving higher managerial positions such as social and information barriers, gender segregation on the labour market, sexual harassment, etc. (Sirůček, 2011c).

3 Women and Science

Last but not least, a failure to utilise women's potential and persisting differences between men and women are also subjected to criticism in the field of science, and/or in academic field. For example, a research project of the Sociological Institute of the Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic called „The National Contact Centre – Woman and Science“ speaks about wasted women's talents. Arguments include a significant disproportion between the number of female scientists (29 % in 2009) and the number of female university students (55 % in 2009). A mere one third representation of women in science is being criticised, as well as the fact that since 2001 this condition has not changed. In 2010, women accounted for 31 % of persons working in research and development, just like in the previous year. Researchers included 26 % of women. And Czech female scientists participate in decision-making processes very rarely. Gender-related pay differences⁴ as well as horizontal and vertical segregation are subjected to criticism. With respect to the “horizontal segregation” it is stated that women are concentrated in medical science (49.8 %), agricultural science (42.5 %) and in humanities (41.9 %). On the contrary, the women representation in technical sciences is only

³ International Labour Organisation

⁴ Women employees classified as scientific and intellectual staff received 70 % of the men's pay, i.e. less than a national average. Since 2002 the pay gap has increased by more than 8 pp to the detriment of women in science.

13.8 %, while researchers in technical sciences account for 48.1 % of the total population of researchers in the Czech Republic. With respect to the “vertical segregation” the arguments are as follows: In 2009, there were 12.9 % of women among public university professors, and 23.5 % of women among associate professors. The time between being granted associate professorship and professorship is longer for women than for men by six months in average; the time difference is biggest in technical sciences, ca 13 months. In 2009, there were 21.1 % of women in decision-making bodies of public universities, and 4.2 % of women among rectors. In 2009, there were 16.7 % of women in the bodies of public research institutions and 16.2 % among their directors. A total representation of women in leading positions of the Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic was 15.5 % in 2011. In the Council for Research, Development and Innovations women account for 9.3 %. There are no women in the management of the Grant Agency of the Czech Republic or in the Technological Agency of the Czech Republic. There are 14 % of women in the bodies in charge of reviewing grant applications in the Grant Agency of the CR and 16.9 % in the Technological Agency of the CR (Sirůček, 2011c; Linková 2011).

3.1 Women in Economics

A discussion on a relatively small representation of women in economics has been almost “traditional”. Gender-oriented analyses in the field of economics traditionally point out that female economists usually work on less prestigious university departments and publish relatively less articles in prestigious printed media; moreover, that women usually prefer teaching economics to research activities, or that professional experience of female economists play a rather minor role when it comes to higher academic positions. When exploring absolute and relative performance of Czech female economists including thematic structure of articles presented by them in magazines or elsewhere shows, for example, that women at the beginning of the 21st century were, in the Czech environment, involved more in macroeconomics than microeconomics or in labour economics. However, drawing more general conclusions thereof is rather contentious and problematic.

A rather small number of women in economics are likely to result from a combination of more factors. Apart from more general reasons, related also to different “equipment” of women and men, including specifically female functions, labour division (including roles of women in family economics, etc.), development of technologies, societal, class and property arrangement, structural barriers, etc., also psychological factors may play their role. The point

is that a scientific career is usually not perceived as a typically female one; often by women themselves.

The basis of explanation – not only, for example, a significantly lower number of prestigious scientific distinctions in economics granted to women – may, in fact, be again very simple and natural. In the period of life, which is usually the most fruitful in terms of formulating new approaches, most women fulfil their maternity tasks. And they can hardly harmonise this role with a professional career. It is often proclaimed that it is a free choice of women, their individual decision. Feminist voices, however, emphasise unequal division of roles at home and in caring for children. The rhetoric of a personal choice is meant to hide a structural embedding of one type of social experience and stereotypes and exclusion of others (for example, dual career couples). In the context of criticism of standard economic doctrines and looking for appropriate „economics for the 21st century“ there are also considerations about the future belonging to the female element in form of unselfish economics or post-modern feminist economics. Feminist reflections of science critically point out complex links between knowledge and power. Some aim at „*science feminisation*“, in the spirit of presumptions on more natural, emphatic and intuitive approach of women to science. Others strive to change the scientific paradigm (Sirůček, 2011c).

Conclusion

One of the decisive factors of the 21st century is a growing influence of women in all areas of life including economic and political areas. The starting point is not only a growing number of women, but, in particular, technological and cultural changes influencing the position of women in society. The ongoing emancipation process creates space for the utilisation of women's potential when dealing with problems faced by the humankind due to a global multicultural society. Traditionally, stereotypes offering women only one decision-making model still persist: either work or family. However, modern women prefer a “balanced” model, equally sharing maternal duties with men. Gender equality as a “social innovation” is put forward also in the scientific environment. When searching for the „economics of the 21st century“ criticism of feminism cannot be avoided. The use of female perspective may lead to more realistic models or a more complex view and enrichment of not only the economics. “Feminist economics” may be inspiring when reflecting on current crises in order to achieve a more balanced economics or society in the light of sustainability.

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