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THE POTENTIAL OF WOMEN AND THE 21ST CENTURY

Zuzana Džbánková[I], Pavel Sirůček[II]
University of Economics, Prague, Czech Republic

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 some selected areas. A position of women in economic theories including inspiration from a modern and/or post-modern feminist economy is also touched upon.

JEL CLASSIFICATION & KEYWORDS

■ B54 ■ J160 ■ J180 ■ J88 ■ GENDER STEREOTYPES ■ WOK-LIFE BALANCE ■ WOMAN IN MANAGEMENT ■ FEMINIST ECONOMICS

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.

Women in 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. 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. 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. In spite of that there are certain established stereotypes showing signs of masculinist culture. And in many countries of the „Western culture“ women still traditionally maintain a position of children caretakers (e.g., in France, Canada and Austria).

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.

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. The growing influence of the female element is closely related to the increasing number of women in the labor market. The starting point is to increase the level of education and training of women. 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, 2011b; ČSÚ, 2011c). However, differences between men and women here remain. Women are over-represented especially in lower paid sectors and insufficiently represented in leadership positions. As a result of stereotypes and childcare and the employment of women is less than optimal. At the same time working housewifes work longer unpaid hours than men. Not only in the opinion of the EU is the inequality between women and men violate fundamental rights. Poor talent management also has a strong negative impact on the economy.

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

[I] dzbank@vse.cz
[II] sirucek@vse.cz

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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 schools[1]), 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).

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, 2011a).

Work Life Balance

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 (ILO[2]). 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).

[1] It is called a „population deficit" or, more specifically, a „demographic bankruptcy" (Možný, 2011).

[2] International Labour Organisation

Women and Business

The private sector is an important factor in the creation of employment opportunities for women. Women are beginning to play a key role also in the field which was completely dominated by men before - in business. Here we can meet them not only in the role of consumers and employees, but also increasingly in the role of leaders and entrepreneurs.

This fact is proven by studies and experiences of IFC[3], which is involved in the promotion of female entrepreneurship in the developing world. The European Social Fund supports these projects in the European Union. For example, in the Czech Republic the education was provided for novice women entrepreneurs under the auspices of project "The Woman and the World of Business". This project was sponsored by the European Social Fund under the Operational Programme Human Resources and Employment and the State Budget of the Czech Republic.

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 (ČSÚ, 2011a).

Women in Management

A slow penetration of women in senior management is also currently considered as a waste of female talent. Therefore, the issue of unequal representation of men and women in management companies are currently engaged by the European Union. The low percentage of women in leadership positions in the business world is in the end damaging Europe's competitiveness and economic growth. The EU wants to create a public debate legislation that would deal with this situation. The introduction of gender quotas is discussed. The experts' opinions of quotas and opinions of actual potential and existing managers are different. The voluntary initiatives that companies take are still not enough. Female potential, especially in the higher managerial positions is scarce. The vision is that women in 2015 will represent 30% of managerial positions and over the next five years, even 40%.

Some Member States, such as Belgium, France, Italy, the Netherlands and Spain, have already started to deal with the situation and adopt legislation establishing gender quotas for board companies. For example, in France legal measures have already been taken to achieve the 40% quota by 2016. Other countries, Denmark, Finland, Greece, Austria and Slovakia, adopted rules for a balanced representation of both sexes on the boards of state enterprises. Czech companies are sadly not that eager to

[3] IFC, a member of the World Bank Group, is the largest global development institution focused exclusively on the private sector in developing countries.

take similar actions. Quotas have also been taken in some countries outside the European Union, e.g. In Norway, where the percentage of women represented on the company boards is now 35.6% (Deloitte 2012).

Table 1: Women in the company management - international comparison	
Country	Share in%
CZ	7,6
Norway	35,6
Spain	9,2
Netherlands	9,2
Italy	6,2
Germany	8,2
France	12,7
Canada	12,9
Australia	11,2
Belgium	7,7
China	8,1
Hong Kong	8,6
USA	15,7
Singapore	6,4
Source: Deloitte Corporate Governance Center CZ	

According to the latest statistics of Deloitte Corporate Governance Centre there is only one woman compared to 12 men in the leadership of hundred largest Czech companies. This figure represents the share of 7.6%. This is more or less the same as in Germany (8.2%). And the European average of 12% shows that women have not succeeded in getting more leadership positions during the last few years. A greater number of women in the top management from ten largest Czech companies is for example represented by Telefónica. The Supervisory Board consists of twelve board members of which one-quarter are women. Current situation of the largest management companies in Czech Top 100 chart shows Tab. 2.

Table 2: Women in the management of companies - Czech Top 100		
Czech Top 100	2000	2011
Executive head / Member of the Board	4,1%	6,7%
Members of Board of Directors	4,5%	6,3%
Executive head	0,0%	8,0%
The members of the supervisory board	8,0%	13,2%
Authorized agent	12,6%	22,0%
Source: Deloitte Corporate Governance Center CZ (6/2012)		

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 differences[4] 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 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).

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

[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.

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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