

University of Nebraska - Lincoln

DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln

Journal of Women in Educational Leadership

Educational Administration, Department of

1-2009

The European Perspective on Women's Leadership

Hildegard Macha

Quirin J. Bauer

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/jwel>



Part of the [Educational Administration and Supervision Commons](#)

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Educational Administration, Department of at DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln. It has been accepted for inclusion in Journal of Women in Educational Leadership by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln.

The European Perspective on Women's Leadership

Hildegard Macha and Quirin J. Bauer

Introduction

The perspective of women in leadership positions is of particular importance in Europe. It is a main subject in the areas of research and science. For example: At the University of Augsburg we conducted several studies of women's leadership and the female academic career in view of gender issues such as gender within the family and in socialization. Furthermore we accomplished two gender mainstreaming studies with the focus on equity in several universities in Germany (Gender mainstreaming is a European law of 1997 and a political strategy of diversity management).

In this article we want to show the perspective on women's leadership in Europe. Therefore we want to present the European data on the educational status of girls and women at schools and universities and in academic careers. Data for Germany is presented as an example to provide evidence of some details. First, we want to point out four contradictions for women in the education system and concerning leadership positions. Second, data is discussed and some results of research explaining the data are given. Finally, we present a European Program for the educational system to give women more chances: The so called "Gender Mainstreaming Program."

The historical remarks show, that there is a need to work with the topic of women's leadership. In general female education in Europe is a story of success. For many decades women in the EU had nearly no access to high level education and to the employment market.

At the beginning of the 20th century, secondary and higher level education became available for them. Within only 100 years, women in the EU have overtaken men in education. Now they have, in general, the better marks at school and the higher degrees. Girls, by average, stay longer in the school system than boys. In Germany, for example, women have had the right for access to higher education since 1909 and they achieved the political right to vote not before the year 1919. In those days, the barriers for women lay in the education system. The "Catholic girls from the countryside" were the girls with the least chances. Within a developmental period of almost 100 years, women came from the bottom of education to the top.

But that does not mean that there is gender equity in Europe nowadays. The barriers for women in their access to high school education are removed; but, they still exist in the job market and in the academic careers. It

About the Authors

Hildegard Macha is professor at the Chair of Education and women's representative at the University of Augsburg, Germany. She is also the director of the Gender Center Augsburg, Germany. Email: hildegard.macha@phil.uni-augsburg.de

M.A. Quirin J. Bauer is Product Manager for Project Management & Corporate Consulting in the Gender Center Augsburg, Germany. He is also the assistant women's representative at the University of Augsburg, Germany. Email: quirin.bauer@gza.uni-augsburg.de.

is difficult, yet important, to discover that such a discursive system is responsible for these barriers and how that system works. There are still strong patriarchal rules keeping women away from high positions. It is important to find a new feministic approach to understand the structures of subconscious gender roles and the structural and institutional barriers. At the moment, research focuses on the analysis of barriers to a fairly balanced representation of women and the deconstruction of traditional gender roles.

Contradictions in the Educational System

Today's Europe is a "waste land" (T.S. Elliott) for women in educational leadership and for leadership positions in science, industry or politics. For example in the academic career: "In most European Member States, more women than men reach a high level of education. However, once graduated, the presence of women clearly decreases at each step of the typical academic career. Indeed, women are more numerous and more successful than men at first degree level: 59% of ISCED5a graduates are women, but their share decreases amongst PhDs to 43% of ISCED6 graduates and reaches a minimum amongst full professors of 15% of Grade A" (ISCED is the International Standard Classification of Education for the Unesco, OECD and Eurostat; Com. Of European States 7.2.2007). Gender imbalance is known to be a serious issue in these areas of employment. The patterns of horizontal and vertical segregation by sex are strongly present in all the examples analyzed. The "leaky pipeline" or the "glass ceiling" are metaphors for the gender gap of women on the career steps for leading positions in the education system. Leaks are mentioned, where women get lost on the career steps. There is a political and scientific discussion on the improvement of women in leadership in Europe, but the instruments to reach gender balance are not effective. The longer existing boys' networks work more effectively. Therefore girls and women are suffering from a special ambiguity: In the European Member States the official doctrine is to guarantee gender equity, but from the subtext line it gets clear that they are not promoted to

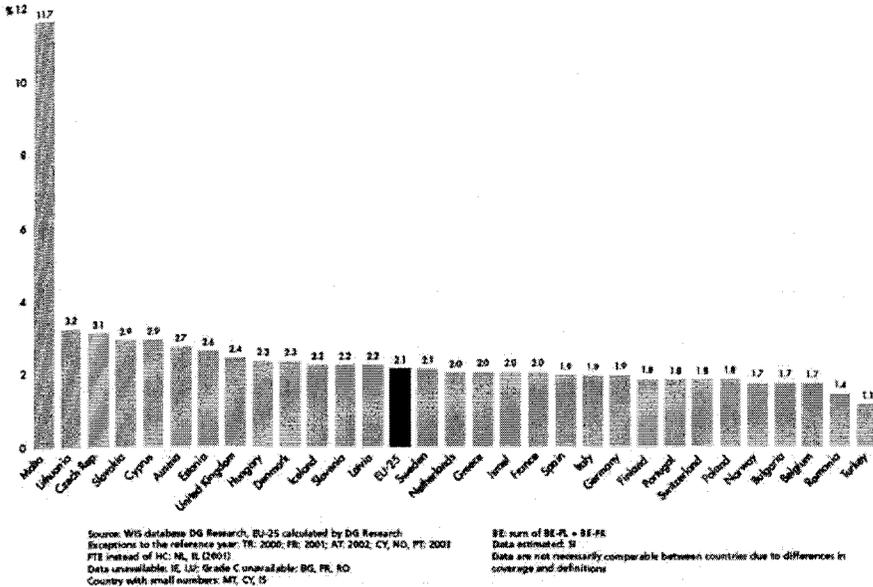


Figure 1.

high level position though girls are successful at school. For these reasons we want to point out some contradictions that oppress women in their career goals and moves.

The glass ceiling index (GCI) allows making comparative assessments of the proportion of women at grade A relative to their presence in the total employed group from which they are drawn. The glass ceiling index represents this relativity by one number for each country, arrived at by dividing the proportion of women in grades A, B and C by the proportion of women in Grade A. A GCI score of more than 1 indicates a glass ceiling effect showing that women are under-represented in grade A positions. In other words, the interpretation of the GCI is that the higher the value the thicker the glass ceiling and the more difficult it is for women to move into a higher position (She Figures, p. 52). The GCI powerfully shows that women are not being utilized to the full extent even within the current employment population. It turns out that there are social, cultural, institutional and personal obstacles that can be identified. Effective policy measures have to be put in place so that the participation rate of women overall also can be improved.

So far, there are four main contradictions in the EU Member States' Education System for girls and women concerning leadership positions.

The first contradiction is: Though there is a need for high quality employees in the EU,—at the moment there are 380,000 free jobs in Germany alone—the future young female elite is not promoted in education.

Highly gifted young girls and women are not promoted and supported at schools and universities. There are deficiencies in the recruitment of highly gifted girls for leading positions. In Germany, for example, there is a discussion concerning a lack of Elite promotion for young female students. Teachers and other students discriminate against highly gifted and talented girls (Heller, 2008; Macha, 2006). Girls receive a message of discouragement; some follow this path with self deconstruction and anorexia. Depreciation and underachievements of girls follow, they “hide” their talent in classes. Highly talented girls are not as visible as young talented boys, because their talents are more spread out and they, as boys, do not concentrate on one field of interest only. In primary schools—for example—there is a rate of 7 to 1 talented female students compared to male students that skip one class. But, at the higher level of high school, there is a rate of 1 girl in comparison to 7 boys left.

The second contradiction is: Though they are not promoted, girls and women now are the winners of the education system.

Although the female elite lacks promotion and support, in general, young girls and women are the winners of the education system. Proportional to male students, they have better marks at school and on the higher exam degrees. More women than men leave college and university with a high degree. For example, following are some average peaks of girls in schools in the 25 member states of the European Union. There are 48.7% of girls in primary schools (that means the ISCED Index 1), nearly 49% of girls in secondary schools (ISCED Index 2), the grade expands to 51% percent of women in college (ISCED Index 3), and to 54.3% grade 5a of women in graduate school (ISCED index 5+6), 58.9% of women graduating at grade 5a and descends to 42.8% women in grade 6 PHD level ISCED. At each step of the academic career, the ranks of women decrease. So: How can this contradiction be understood? Female students in general are better at school and have the better fitting learning skills; in general they are more successful. In the EU, young women reach a higher grade of education than young men at tertiary education. For example, 56% percent of women reach the German Abitur (high school degree) after high school. They have compensated for the lack of education they endured for many decades until the 1970's. In general, qualifications are higher among young women than young men (Eurydice, 2005). Girls stay longer in the school system than boys. The reasons are, that girls are more hardworking and diligent, interspersing, powerful and efficient (Hurrelmann, 2008). They know how to get along in society. “These girls and women are going to change society! They cannot be stopped” (Allmendinger, 2008).

The third contradiction is: In spite of high quality education level, women have poorer access to leading positions in the academic career and other leading positions.

In spite of their success, the best educated generation of young women in Europe is not able to get leading positions equivalent to their degrees in the education system. Gender segregation of the labor market is evidenced both for job and economic sectors. In consequence, there is an under-representation of women in sectors crucial for economic development and usually well remunerated. The segregated job market is not receptive for these women to assume high positions corresponding to their graduation level. Women in the education system and in the whole employment market cannot get leading positions, because of several barriers. So we have the evidence, that highly gifted girls and women are in a double bind situation: In spite of not being supported as an elite, they are the winners of the education system but are not integrated in high positions in the employment market. Therefore there is a “shadow of deprivation or depreciation” on each woman in her educational career. There is no empowerment at all.

The European discussion on women in leadership focuses on the academic career more than on school administration. The reason is that there is no regular initial training program required at the school administration level for all the 25 Member States of the EU. In the United Kingdom, in 2004, the “National Professional Qualification for Headship (NPQH)” became mandatory for all new headteachers. In general, school heads in the Member States of the EU have to have some professional teaching experience (mostly 3–5 years), and administrative experience, but there is no initial standard training. In Germany, for example, there is no standard training program and no general statistics concerning school heads, because election lays in the responsibility of the 16 federal States of Germany and the procedure of election is quite different. A special qualification program for school leaders exists only in a few European States. But at the moment, all over Europe there are no programs for women in leadership at all. The same situation is mentioned for school bureaucracy at ministries and school administration. There exists no standard qualifying program for women at all.

In the field of science and humanities (She Figures, 2006 Figure 3.1), we have the following situation with men and women in a typical academic career, as well as students, and academic staff (EU-25, 1999–2003, 2006: “The Scissors Diagram”).

This is the typical scissors diagram that describes the chances of women and men from ISCED 5a (student at university) to Grade A (senior professor). It graphically illustrates the way in which the gender gap changes throughout the stages of an academic career, which only mentioned the vertical dimension of gender imbalance.

The horizontal gender differences in choice of field and sector of employment give rise to questions about the long-term viability of EU aspirations for R&D and the societal disadvantages of a gender-based research environment. The questions increase in urgency when the vertical dimension is considered. The vertical dimension of patterns of employment – that is, the relative distribution

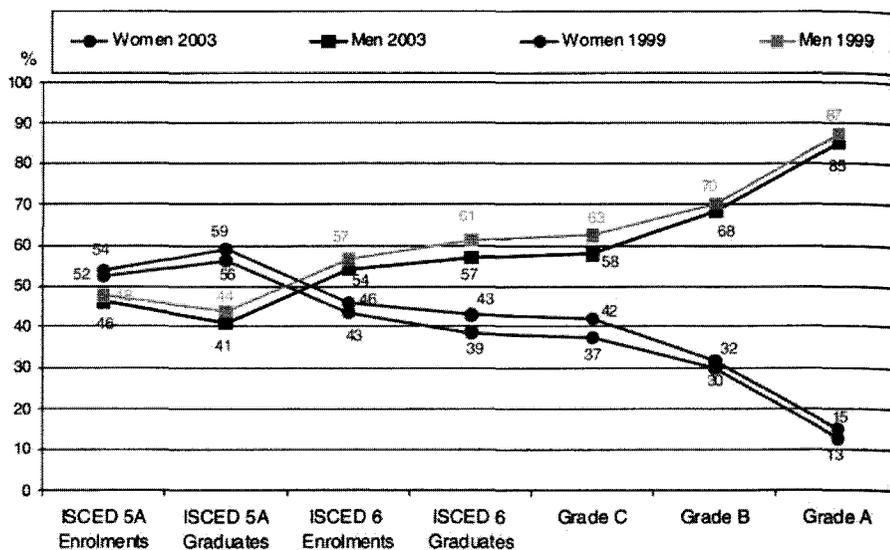


Figure 2. Definition of grades: A—The single highest grade/post at which research is normally conducted within the institutional or corporate system, B—Researchers working in positions not as senior as top positions (A) but more senior than the newly qualified PhD holders, C—The first grade/post into which a newly qualified PhD (ISCED6) graduate would normally be recruited within the institutional or corporate system.

of women and men at the different levels of seniority within the employment hierarchy—is crucially important, since it is at the senior levels that decisions are made and leadership is exercised in defining and carrying forward the research agenda (She Figures, 2006).

In addition, the scientific career is less attractive for women having equal abilities as men because there are fewer opportunities to be promoted to senior posts at a proportionately commensurate rate. “Although the proportion of women has increased slightly at all stages on the graph, the pattern remains constant. Women students are in the majority in higher education at ISCED 5a level and by graduation have increased their lead over men” (She Figures, 2006). But for registered students at PhD and equivalent level (ISCED 6), the male/female relativities are reversed, and thereafter, women’s proportional participation continues to decline, with the divergence from men increasing quite dramatically at grade B and again at grade A. When starting university, students in the EU are dominantly female at 54% in 2003, they graduate at a level of nearly 59% in relation to 44% of men. Then chances drop dramatically at each step of the academic career: At grade D PhD level only 42.8% of women are left, and so at each step the female rate decreases: Grade C 42%, Grade B 32% until 15% at grade A, the senior professors. In some highly developed countries like

Germany, there are only a few women in the academic career, nearly half the percentage of the EU.

In the EU, as a whole, the percentage of women graduating at this level stands at 43%. This is an improvement on the situation in 1999, when the EU average was 38%. But it masks gender variations across subject groupings. And you see, that three of the larger countries, France, the UK, and Germany, are below the EU average.

As an example of gender differences in this field, you see the same range of data but for natural science and engineering. The graph shows an extreme gender gap. Gender differences are so persistent that they will not self-correct in the foreseeable future. Within the EU as a whole, women are in senior posts within the humanities to a far greater degree (23.9%) than for any other field. In engineering and technology, women's representation is as low as 5.8%.

The fourth contradiction is: The EU Research capacity will be difficult to sustain, if the female resource is not drawn in a more equitable manner.

In addition, there is clear evidence that women are under-deployed in research generally and in Science and Technique specifically, have poorer access to R&D resources, receive a lower chance than men of reaching senior levels or holding positions of influence in research, for example through membership on scientific boards. "The EU's research capacity will be difficult to sustain and impossible to increase according to the ambitious plans

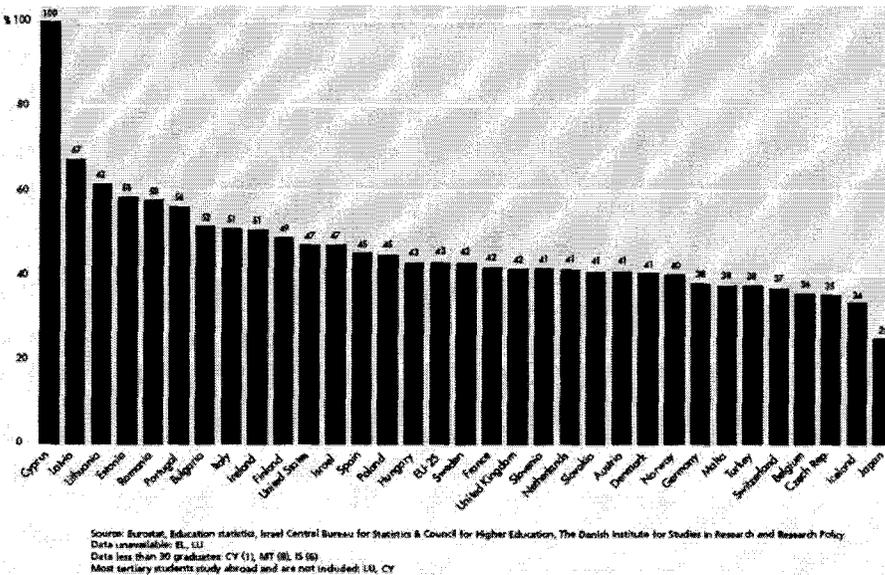


Figure 3. Proportion of female PhD (ISCED 6) graduates 2003 (She Figures, 2006).

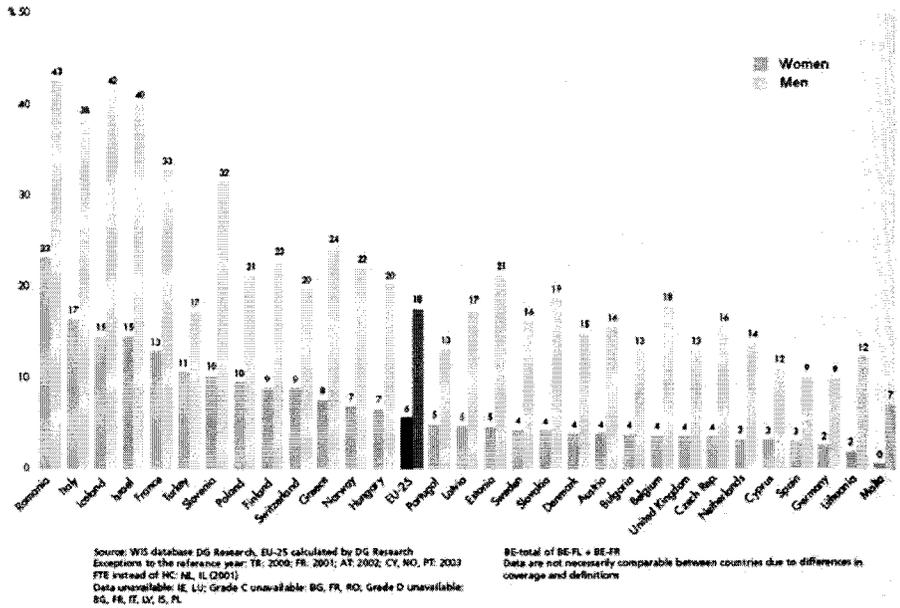


Figure 4. Percentage of Grade A among all academic staff by sex (WiS database, 2004).

that have been set, if intellectual resources are not drawn from those with appropriate abilities and attainment on a more equitable basis than they are at present” (She Figures, 2006).

There are several reasons for obstacles and barriers for female students and for not electing more women for leadership positions in the EU:

1. Structural and institutional reasons:

- General responsibility of women in the EU for the Work-Family-Balance: A birth rate of 1.4 child per pair in Germany. Only 3% of children are in a day care in early childhood. There are changes in the gender roles and in the “new fathers”,
- Deprivation for the female elite at schools and universities,
- Discrimination against women in leading positions in the education system,
- No special training programs for women at the administration level as school heads or in ministries.

2. Personal and family socialization reasons:

- No promotion of high career goals for girls in families, no planning of career steps by women, men now are the conservative part of family.
- Discrimination and prejudice against mothers at work: They are called “Rabemütter”, a specific German term meaning uncaring or bad mothers (typically not translatable).

- Underachievement of talented girls “disappearing” while being present, not showing their intelligence.
- Self destruction within girls: anorexia.

3. Gender Mainstreaming

For 10 years Gender Mainstreaming has been a main issue of policy on the level of the European Union and on the national level to face the figured problems. Gender Mainstreaming is a law which was implemented in the European Parliament in 1997. It is a program of empowerment for women. “Gender Mainstreaming means: the (re)organization, improvement, development and evaluation of policy processes, to ensure that a gender equality perspective is incorporated at all levels and stages of all policies by those normally involved in policy making” (Recommendation CM/Rec 2007/13 of the Committee of Ministers to Member States of the EU on Gender Mainstreaming in Education). The Committee of Ministers of the EU advocates for: “Making gender mainstreaming one of the objectives of educational and career guidance.” The following aims are aspired to with this strategy:

- Gender Sensibility,
- Gender Equality,
- Diversity Management,
- Quota for Women,
- Women in Leadership,
- Organizational Development,
- Systemic Transformation,
- Quality of Work and
- Contentment of Staff.

First effects of this strategy can be measured, as shown by the example of the University of Augsburg:

- Organizational and Structural Development concerning gender equity; consciousness and awareness of gender equity, “circles” and cells of gender equality in faculties and administration, change management,
- Equality in Staff Policy,
- Top Down Strategy: according to money and decisions,
- 5 Collective Actors in the law of the university,
- Family friendly activities: Kindergarten etc.,
- Agreements on Objectives with the faculties,
- Gender Mainstreaming as a Motto and Slogan of the University of Augsburg,
- Sponsoring of a Gender Professorship by the President,
- Reshaping the Role of the Women's Representative: from an intervening lobbyist to a change manager.

In principle, if gender equality is to be achieved, all practises and behaviours in the academic domain as well as institutions such as universities have to be considered under the aspect of gender. Gender Mainstreaming is a successful strategy for realizing the equality of women and men in higher education and for women in leadership positions in Germany and Europe.

References

- Allmendinger, J. (2008): *Frauen auf dem Sprung*. Hamburg: Gruner und Jahr Verlag.
- Committee of Ministers to Member States on Gender Mainstreaming in Education (Europarat 2007): Recommendation CM/Rec (2007)13.
- Com. of European States (2007): *Yearly Annex on the Situation of Women and Men*.
- European Commission (2004): *WiS Database, DG Research*.
- European Commission (2005): *Eurydice—Das Informationsnetz zum Bildungswesen in Europa. Schlüsselzahlen zum Bildungswesen in Europa. Eurostat 2005*.
- European Commission (2006): *She Figures 2006. Women and Science, Statistics and Indicators*.
- Hurrelmann, K. & Grundmann, M. & Walper, S. (2008): *Handbuch Sozialisationsforschung. Vollst. überarb. 7. Auflage*. Weinheim: Beltz Verlag.
- Kommission der europäischen Gemeinschaften (2007): *Bericht der Kommission zur Gleichstellung von Frauen und Männern*.
- Macha, H. & Handschuh-Heiß, S. (2007): *Gender Mainstreaming als Instrument der Organisationsentwicklung an Hochschulen*. In: Macha, H. & Fahrwald, C. (Hrsg.): *Gender Mainstreaming und Weiterbildung—Organisationsentwicklung durch Potentialentwicklung*. Opladen & Farmington Hills: Barbara Budrich. S. 60–84.
- Macha, H. (2004): *Rekrutierung von weiblichen Eliten*. In: *Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte. Beilage zur Zeitschrift, "Das Parlament"*, B. 10, S. 25-33.
- Macha, H. (2008): *Weibliche Eliten: vernachlässigt und entmutigt*. In: *zwd-Magazin Bildung, Gesellschaft, Politik 1*, S.11–12.