

# How has the transformation of economies and societies in Central and Eastern Europe contributed to the discussion on *gender in management*?

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## 1. Introduction

It was quite a surprise to me to be asked by Thomas Steger to participate in the sub-plenary discussion on management research from Central and Eastern Europe at EGOS 2018 in Tallinn. The reason of the surprise was not only the fact that it occurred on considerable short notice. It has turned out that one plenary discussant was not able to take part in it. Additionally, I did not consider myself as an “expert” in management studies in Central and Eastern Europe. Born and socialized in Lithuania, I found academic exile in German management and organization studies, with only a small part of my research dealing with management issues in post-socialist countries. Due to several German-Lithuanian research projects on leadership in the public sector, I am quite familiar with management discourses in Lithuania and the Baltic States. Being a member of the JEEMS editorial committee since 2009 has allowed me to become acquainted with management research also beyond the Baltic States. Nevertheless, an “expert” in management studies from Central and Eastern European countries? As someone who deals a lot with gender issues in management, I admonished myself for this classical example of a gendered lack of self-confidence, and decided to participate in the sub-plenary. Instead of considering myself solely as an easy fill-in, I pondered to strategically use this podium and to discuss a topic that has been provoking and astonishing me for several years: neglect of CEE countries in management research on gender issues. I was happy to get a spontaneous and strong approval of this idea by Thomas Steger.

The following text is an extended version of my sub-plenary presentation at EGOS in Tallinn. I will start with one paradox: the lack of research on gender issues in management studies from CEE countries, despite the fact that particu-

larly these countries seem to be doing quite well in terms of women participation in management. In the next part, I will deal with the second paradox related to the topic: the so called socialist legacy is often supposed to be fostering women participation in the labour force; what has remained largely unacknowledged, however, is the fact that gender inequality was institutionalized by the socialist legacy with regard to higher organizational positions as well. After discussing some of potential reasons that potentially have led to a lack of research on this topic, I will propose the relevance of the consideration of CEE countries in the gender-oriented management research by showing that this undertaking may lead to a theoretical progress in the field of gender and management. This is the reason for why I will mention a special issue of JEEM we are preparing currently that is dedicated to the topic of gender in management in the last part of my statement.

My appreciation is to all discussants and participants of the sub-plenary session in Tallinn that expressed their interest in the topic and gave me relevant hints regarding the existing research on gender and management in their home countries in Central and Eastern Europe.

## **2. Gender issues in management in CEE countries: a neglected terrain**

The issue of gender-based inequality in management has fuelled a considerable amount of research. The main focus was and still is given to countries in Western Europe and North America. Selected examples of recent studies, like Elliott and Stead (2018), Lyness and Grotto (2018), just illustrate the main tendency. The regions beyond have remained underrepresented up to now. Neither the classic work in gender and management, like Elisabeth Ross Kanter (1977), nor the more recent work on this issue deals with the region on the eastern side of Europe.

The situation is quite astonishing given the fact that Central and Eastern European (CEE) countries are quite pioneering in terms of gender equality as it is shown by anecdotal evidence as well as by current statistics. For example, the Croatian president, Kolinda Grabor-Kitarovic, received considerable media attention during the Football World Cup in Russia 2018 as a passionate supporter of the national team in contrast to her quite reluctant male colleagues from other countries. Just another anecdotal fact: In July 2018, as the Baltic States received the award of peace by the city of Münster, Germany, two of the three heads of awarded countries that took part at the ceremony were women: Kersti Kaljulaid (the president of Estonia) and Dalia Grybauskaitė (the Lithuanian president).

Statistical data support this anecdotal evidence: According to the International Labour Organization, Belarus (46,2 per cent), Latvia (45,7 per cent) and Moldova (44,1 per cent) belong to top ten of countries with globally highest shares of

women with management experience (International Labour Organization 2015: 19) in 2014. A similar picture is provided by studies on women's share in senior management positions, made by Grant Thornton or Catalyst. Some of the CEE countries, like Poland, Russia or Latvia, belong to the top performers with more than 40 per cent of senior leadership roles filled by women (Goryunova et al. 2017: 18). At the same time, it should not be ignored that the records of women's share in top-management are quite heterogeneous in different CEE countries. Whereas the Baltic States represent positive models, in Romania, for example, the women's share in boards of large listed companies remains much below the EU-28 average with 10,1 per cent (Romanian National Institute of Statistics 2014: 109).

Beyond the sphere of business, data that refer to the field of political institutions suggest that in some CEE countries the share of women in political institutions, like parliament, already approaches but still does not reach the Western European references (e.g. Carli & Eagly 2016; Klein 2013). On the basis of data provided by Goryunova, Scribner and Madsen (2017: 7-11) regarding women's share in state parliaments in CEE countries that are summarized in Table 1, we can state that especially Slovenia and Macedonia with 36,7 and 33,3 per cent respectively stay close to Germany with 36,5 per cent of women in the parliament. Even then, the leading countries in this regard, Rwanda and Bolivia with over 60 and 50 per cent of parliamentary women's share, remain barely achievable.

**Table 1: Women's share in parliaments of the CEE countries based on Goryunova et al. 2017: 7-11.**

Country	Women share in parliament	Country	Women share in parliament
1 Slovenia	36,7	10 Bulgaria	20,4
2 Macedonia	33,3	11 Estonia	19,8
3 Belarus	27,3	12 Czech Republic	19,0
4 Croatia	25,8	13 Latvia	18,0
5 Poland	24,1	14 Slovakia	18,7
6 Lithuania	23,4	15 Romania	13,7
7 Bosnia and Herzegovina	21,4	16 Russia	13,6
8 Albania	20,7	17 Ukraine	11,8
9 Moldova	20,8	18 Hungary	10,1

Given these statistics, it could be assumed that CEE countries provide insightful experiences and practices of women's inclusion into the workforce in general and into managerial and political positions in particular. Nevertheless, the topic has remained a peripheral and mainly neglected issue in the international research discussion on gender in management. Even if the specific local cultural

and institutional context is increasingly conceived as relevant in order to understand gender and management, as it is indicated e.g. by such recent work as “Current Perspectives on Asian Women in Leadership”, edited by Cho, Ghosh, Sun, and McLean (2017), the research tackling the nexus between gender and management in CEE countries remains scarce. The few existing studies that are done in the field of gender studies are mainly oriented toward women’s roles in CEE countries in general (e.g. Ashwin and Isupova 2018) and do not explicitly focus on an employment context. Only female entrepreneurs have been given marginally stronger attention. The publication record of JEEMS, one of the few internationally acknowledged journals in the field of East European management studies, is indicative in this regard. In more than 20 years of publishing, only few publications have addressed the issue of gender. The only paper on women and management that was included into the anniversary issue of JEEMS that comprises most representative papers of JEEMS was published by Llaci and Kume (2017) and deals with female entrepreneurs and managers in Albanian businesses. Gender-related management issues beyond entrepreneurship in the CEE context, like becoming and being women leaders, factors supporting or hindering careers of women, acceptance by employees, HRM practices and gender equality are largely a research lacuna.

### 3. The socialist legacy of gender issues and its contradictions

Despite a lack of research, the fact that CEE countries are factually doing well with regard to gender equality, is mainly traced back to the so called “socialist-legacy” of the region. The full-employment-policy for women as pursued by the socialist states and established child-caring institutions from an early age are supposed to sufficiently explain the current, relatively advantageous situation. This straightforward explanation, however, loses its power when we consider the fact that the socialist legacy is not without its inconsistencies. As for the case of gender-issues in the socialist countries, gender equality and inequality were strongly interlinked. Despite the gender equality in terms of employment participation by women, the inequality in terms of higher wages and better career prospects for male workers was obvious. Research informed by feminist theories indicate a strong „gender ideology“ in some of the CEE countries, especially Russia. “Gender ideology” is considered a deeply ingrained thinking that legitimizes gender inequality (Ashwin and Isupova 2018) and a social inferiority of women in comparison to men (Pavlenko 2002: 98). Neither in the socialist time nor during the post-socialist transformations or afterwards has this ideology lost its vitality. The fact that domestic work was considered as the main responsibility of working women is seen as a strong indication that the “gender ideology” is dominating. It results in the fact that gender inequality has been widely accepted in some CEE societies until now. Furthermore, the “socialist legacy” as an argument should be considered with caution due to the fact that it cannot explain the

wide variance among the former socialist countries regarding women's share in management positions, as stated above.

#### **4. Reasons for lacking research on gender and management in CEE countries**

The reasons for lacking research regarding gender and management in CEE countries are manifold. One of them may be seen in a lacking of societal awareness for the relevance of gender issues in general and gender consideration with regard to management in particular. Gender questions are often seen as interlinked with feminism and are considered either as marginal and irrelevant or as threatening traditional values, like family and social peace. Potentially, it has to do with the still dominant influence of the church in the region. The powerful catholic or orthodox churches in CEE countries, like in Poland and Romania (e.g. Maj 2017: 79), mainly support the conservative hegemony. Gender equality, to put the matter at its lowest, usually does not belong to their agenda. Accordingly, the topic of gender and management in the academia of CEE countries is accredited with "the relatively low political capital" (Maj 2017: 278). Because of this, it does not attract strong attention from experienced or young scholars and remains mainly marginalized.

The second reason why research on gender in management from the perspective of CEE countries is lacking has to do with the system of academic publishing. When research attempts on this topic are undertaken, the resulting publications often are written in the local language, without gaining access to international venues of publishing. Taking part in an international academic discourse often requires a mobilization of considerable resources in terms of translation from the local language into English, academic networks and knowing how the international publishing business works – resources that are barely given in notoriously under-supplied and under-financed universities and research institutions in CEE countries. Though they are few, there are some examples for locally oriented research that deals with the nexus between gender and management reaching the international discourse. One of the examples is the study by Jännäri, Poutanen and Kovaleinen (2018) on 'doing gender' in job advertisements in Finland and Estonia. The work was just recently published in 'Gender in Management: An International Journal' and goes back to the English-written dissertation of Jatta Jännäri at the University of Turku (Estonia)<sup>1</sup>.

#### **5. Research prospects on gender in management in CEE countries**

The existing research on gender and management is not only lacking an explicit consideration of the specific post-socialist context in CEE countries. It often misses thorough and context-sensitive approaches in general. This myopic way

1 Many thanks to Maaja Vadi for her tip regarding dissertation by Jana Jännäri.

of context-free considerations becomes particularly obvious in case of theoretical discussion on gender and management. The theorizing on women and management often proceeds in a universalistic manner. Most of the theories that research on gender inequality in management draw upon, including such concepts as inequality regimes (Acker 2006), tokenism (Kanter 1977), role incongruity theory (Eagly and Karau 2002) or glass cliff (Ryan and Haslam 2005) (for a recent overview please see contributions in *Handbook of Research on Gender and Leadership*, edited by Susan R. Madsen, 2018), were developed in a North American or Western European context. The issue of the role specific cultural or historical background might have while developing theories is mainly neglected here.

While tackling gender in management from the specific background of the CEE countries may not only provide new empirical data, it may also foster theoretical progress in the field since it allows for a consideration of previous theoretical concepts on gender and management in a critical and context-reflexive manner. It might lead to a rethinking of gender in management as well as to a reformulation of existing theoretical concepts or to a development of new ones. This provides a point of departure for a fruitful research agenda that encompasses different prospects for future research in this field. The gender-oriented management research with focus on CEE countries may include the analysis of:

- Cultural frames, schemes and stereotypes regarding women in management in CEE countries
- Organizational micro-practices of women's inclusion in management but also exclusion from it or informal structures of 'established and outsiders' in organizations
- HRM practices, such as selection, training, appraisal, rewards, supervising, in reference to gender issues
- The expression of glass ceiling and glass cliffs in CEE countries.

The lack of research and contradicting tendencies triggered the idea of a special issue of JEEMS. Edited by Anna Soulsby (Nottingham University, UK), Susanne Blazejewski (Alanus University, Germany) and me, a special Issue of JEEMS on Women in Management in CEE countries is in preparation for 2019. It aims to offer a publishing platform to researchers that explicitly deal with the topic of gender in management in the CEE context. For the special issue, we hope to attract insightful and rigorous recent studies that represent a substantial contribution to international discussion on women in management: [https://www.jeems.nomos.de/fileadmin/jeems/doc/JEEMS\\_SI\\_Women\\_in\\_Management\\_CfP\\_final.pdf](https://www.jeems.nomos.de/fileadmin/jeems/doc/JEEMS_SI_Women_in_Management_CfP_final.pdf)

## 6. Conclusions

The point of departure of this essay was the question how the transformation of economies and societies in Central and Eastern Europe has contributed to the discussion on *gender in management*. The answer we are able to deliver at the moment is rather sobering: Despite the supposedly extensive experiences in managerial positions held by women, despite the ambivalences and intricacy linked to the so called “socialist legacy” in case of women in management and despite numerous questions remaining, only few considerations of women and management in the CEE countries can be found, with none of them being an important point of reference in the international discussion in the field. The transformational context of the post-socialist countries in CEE still represents a lacuna in the research on management-related gender issues. Similarly, it still remains open how processes of societal transformation interlink with gender issues and gender equality in organizations. It is also to be proved whether the theories on gender in management, that are all without exception rooted in US-based or Western European traditions, are valid for CEE. When the research on gender in management aims to gain fresh and innovative empirical as well as conceptual approaches, it needs to abandon its narrow geographical focus that has been dominating previous debates and to open up towards context-sensitive explorations from different regions beyond Western Europe and North America. In-depth analyses from CEE countries that explicitly consider local historical, political and transformational context of gender issues in organizations will provide fruitful contributions.

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