

Navigating barriers to gender equality in the European Union context

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Valorisation Addendum

VALORIZATION ADDENDUM

It is widely accepted that knowledge valorization adds a surplus value to society and economy and also accelerates scientific progress (Hladchenko, 2015). Valorization can be defined as “the process of value creation from knowledge, by making it applicable and available for economic or societal utilization, and by translating it in the form of new business, products, services, or processes” (Maastricht University, 2019). This section will address an overview of the research findings regarding the relevance for society, policy makers and researchers. The activities undertaken so far and planned to disseminate the research findings are also detailed. Furthermore, the innovative aspect of the study is highlighted as well.

Relevance for society

Applying insights from social constructivism, this thesis explored the gendered barriers within the framework of bounded social reality, which is shaped from shared beliefs, knowledge, institutional context and personal values.

Building upon previous research on barriers to women’s leadership and gender equality, the present dissertation showcased the strong, underlying interactions among gender, leadership and social context shedding light to the varying degree of strengths of norms, power relations and gendered barriers embedded in a society’s egalitarian practices (Collins, 2000). The social construction of gendered barriers was established conceptually, contextually and functionally within study’s deployment. The proven similarities and differences in the socio-cultural and economic contexts the gendered barriers manifest themselves, draw attention to social patterns which, depending the degree of cultural tightness, have an important effect on employment choices and work/life balance. Hence, the research findings recognized a direct link between manifestation and prevalence of gendered barriers to country’s specificity.

The added value of analyzing the relationship between country’s socio-cultural contexts and the socially rooted gendered barriers derives from the epistemological position that actors participate in a way or another in building social reality in which they are active (Hantrais and Mangen, 2013). Thereby, this research may also inform social actors on the important role they play in the dynamic dialogue among societal culture, leadership and gender; these interactions may shape the necessary mechanisms to enable social and cultural change.

Furthermore, the study appraised empirically the “regimes of truth” (Foucault, 1991) pertaining to gendered barriers and culturally legitimate societal power and authority as unfolded in the

processes of cultural and social reality. In that line, as the social dimension is becoming ever more critical for the EU towards addressing inequalities and achieving social cohesion, the findings of this research may serve as case to raise awareness on the gender asymmetries in terms of power and authority influenced differently within a country's social and cultural context. Putting evidence into practice is complicated and context dependent; yet, it remains a dynamic process with a continuous interaction between research, policy and social actors which may "feel" and evaluate the level of responsiveness to social audiences.

Relevance for policy makers

Although gender equality principle was anchored in the EU Treaties (e.g. Treaty of Rome, Treaty of Amsterdam, Treaty of Lisbon) and positioned as an overarching policy objective for over two decades, the slow, fragmented and uneven progress indicated that EU policies and strategies have not been translated yet into achievable targets both at EU and Member States level. Scholars, gender experts and policy reports have voiced criticism for the poor outcomes listing a number of reasons and solutions to improve effectiveness.

This thesis invites policy actors and decision makers to follow the "think globally – act locally" strategy in gender equality policies in order to avoid widening the gap between policy and reality. The European gender equality policy has significant political and social impact on a society organized for co-existence and in alignment to achieving egalitarian social order. The studies included in this dissertation provide evidence-informed insights to highlight the importance of contextuality in addressing gendered challenges across Member States. In particular, the research findings established that the features of comprehensiveness and evidence-based prevalence of gendered barriers may be the tipping factor to improve policy relevance to practice and effectiveness.

Achieving gender equality is a journey, not a destination and gender inequalities are deeply rooted in each Member State's specific social reality. Taking that into consideration, policy actors may work hand in hand with decision makers to shape context-specific, evidence-informed policies, strategies and practices to effect substantial change and address effectively the barriers and controversies within country's specific context.

Relevance for researchers

This thesis applied a qualitative research methodology using mixed methods to better explore the explored phenomena and offer an informed and sophisticated knowledge reconstruction (Lincoln and Guba, 2000). Drawn on social constructivism paradigm, a mixed methods qualitative approach was employed to ensure quality criteria of trustworthiness and authenticity. Although mixed methods qualitative studies have been criticized for tendency to bias and content validity, the studies of this dissertation focused on the triangulation of data as the main advantage of the applied mixed methodology. On the grounds that there is no "single truth" and that all truths are partial and incomplete (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000, p. 162), this thesis opted for a "most informative,

complete, balance and useful research results” (Johnson and Onwuegbuzie, 2007, p. 129) to better understand and interpret the explored phenomenon and reconstruct knowledge.

In this thesis, the systematic review of the scientific literature was supplemented by policy reports on the progress towards achieving the gender equality objectives, evaluation reports on gender equality policy in EU and Member States and studies conducted by gender experts. Although these sources have not been scientific papers, in the sense that they were not necessarily peer reviewed, it was considered to add value in the knowledge base of this thesis offering expertise, comprehensiveness and timeliness and, thus, shaping a balanced picture of available evidence (Paez, 2017).

Dissemination of findings

The findings of this research have been distributed via various channels to researchers, policy makers, stakeholders, public health organizations and students. Three out of five studies included in this thesis have been published, two manuscripts are currently under review in international peer-reviewed journals (e.g. Equality, Diversity and Inclusion: An International Journal, Frontiers in Public Health, Journal Healthcare Leadership, Journal of European Social Policy and Journal of Organizational Change Management). The study findings have also been presented and discussed via oral and poster presentations and workshops at relevant international conferences (e.g. EUPHA, European Conference of Health Workforce Education & Research, Women in Global Health Research Initiative, International Symposium on Human Rights in Patient Care, Global Health Forum). As such publications and conference presentations mainly reach researchers and international experts, other methods have been used to disseminate the findings, such as dedicated workshops and policy briefs. Two policy briefs are currently written to translate the relevant knowledge to the policy makers language in order to optimize the knowledge utilization. However, dissemination of these findings may still not reach decision makers as they may use other information sources and lobbying cycles. Research findings need to be actively communicated and tailored to enhance perceptibility of the decision-makers; to enhance research findings dissemination and enhance applicability, they need to be translated into an easy, affordable and measurable solution (Choi et al, 2003). The translation may be achieved through an increased engagement of scientists within debates dedicated to sustainable development in organizations and society.

The findings of the research undertaken as part of this dissertation have also been integrated in different educational programs. Lectures on the research have been given to the Master Program Governance and Leadership in European Public Health and in the Bachelor program European Public Health, Maastricht University. In addition, lectures are scheduled in the next academic year at the Department of Health Policy and Management, Indianapolis University. A Summer School at Hellenic Mediterranean University, Greece will take place in next academic year offering training on equality, diversity and inclusion to professionals and decision makers from health-related organizations (Public Health Schools, hospitals, research centers, etc) in South Eastern Europe and

the broader Mediterranean Region. In addition, two free accessed workshops are scheduled to take place in Athens, Greece under the auspices of 50plus Hellas, (the national organization concerned with the rights of people over the age of 50 in Greece and with their quality of life) in order to raise awareness on gendered barriers.

It is within author's intentions to continue knowledge dissemination in the future expanding the channels described above.

Innovation

Although there is a growing body of literature exploring the barriers to women's leadership and gender equality, there are hardly any studies addressing systematically the barriers' comprehensive manifestation within organizations, not alone the barriers' prevalence in relation to organizational and socio-cultural contexts. At the author's best knowledge, the studies in this dissertation were one of the first to develop a Barriers Thematic Map (BTM) with a prevalence feature.

The BTM may be developed to a digital tool and used by human resources department and/or equality, diversity and inclusion experts in organizations. The tool may produce an overview of the gendered barriers' manifestation and prevalence within organization. The tool includes a data anonymization method which may offer the room to unveil both apparent and implicit barriers experienced by all genders bypassing, thus, potential power relations within organizations. This evidence based snapshot may disclose policy gaps and be linked to organization specific practice related strategies. The yielded evidence-based information will also contribute to effective use of resources, which may be channeled to fulfil targeted needs and, therefore, improve organization's change capabilities and performance. Furthering, the organization's barriers' snapshot may provide orientation for developing specific training programs responding to the identified needs; for example, training focusing on sexual harassment, or on women's empowerment to overcome the glass ceiling effect or training the decision makers on the benefits an organization may reap from gendered balanced teams. Thereby, the research findings may be translated in an innovative, applicable way and incorporated in efforts to bring about organizational and social change towards achieving gender equality objectives.

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