



## Gender – an Issue for Social Organizations in Germany?

*Chris Lange, Evangelical School of Applied Science Berlin*

During the last months and years the English expression ‘gender‘ has become a well-known word all over Germany, often with the annex ‘mainstreaming‘. Gender mainstreaming was initiated as a political strategy by the Women’s World Conference in Beijing in 1995 and adopted by the European Union in 1997 (COM(96)76 final). It basically means that *all* actions and initiatives planned have to be tested as to their effects on women and men and should not be taken if they disadvantage either one. But gender is also a category in the discussion about democratic features. Gender democracy means that males and females should be represented equally in the public, political, cultural, social and economic sphere of a society.

On this background, this paper traces the gender issue in the field of organizations in the social sector of Germany, in particular the ‘welfare organizations‘. In this article, ‘welfare organizations‘ is used as a translation of the German word ‘Wohlfahrtsverbände‘. The reason for this choice is the endeavor to indicate their difference from for instance English ‘charitable associations‘ or French ‘associations sociale et sanitaire‘, because social organizations in the EU-member states differ considerably in regard to their history, function, self-image, financing, political power etc.. The terms ‘social non-governmental organizations‘ (NGOs) or ‘social nonprofit organizations‘ (NPOs) are used synonymously.

The welfare organizations in question are the following six: *Caritas*, which is affiliated to the Catholic Church; *Diaconia*, which is affiliated with the Protestant Church; the *Workers’ Welfare Association*, which originated in the workers’ movement and is still affiliated with the Social Democrats, the *German Red Cross*, the *Non-denominational Welfare Association*, which assembles many very different members on the ground of humanitarian principles, and the *Central Welfare Office of the Jews in Germany*. They are organized in the *Federal Consortium of Non-Statutory Welfare* (Bundesarbeitsgemeinschaft der Freien Wohlfahrtspflege, short: BAGFW) as their common representative on the national as well as on the European level. These organizations provide a major part of human services in Germany; for instance

- about 23.300 or 74% of the housing facilities, counseling and help g agencies for children and youth,
- over 27.700 or 57% of all institutions for the elderly and the disabled (BAGFW 2001).

Presently they employ about 3% of the German workforce (more than DaimlerChrysler), and they exert considerable political influence on the various political-administrative levels .

This article is about women in the welfare organizations as observed in the present time – although a historical review would also be very interesting. There is a certain focus on women

in the welfare organization *Diaconia* – precisely: on female employees (not on female volunteers or women in Christian sisterhoods), because most of the data found concerned *Diaconia*. First, some statistical data about the employment and the representation of women in the organizations in question is given, followed by a look at the relevant literature as well as at affirmative action programs for women. Then, the findings of three studies will be reported and some reflections about possible explanations of the observed shared before the article ends with some final remarks.

### Some statistical figures

With their need for social, therapeutic and care professions – therefore, ‘typical’ female professions – the welfare organizations have always been of great importance for female employment. Moreover, the amount of services provided by the welfare organizations has grown considerably over the last decades and the number of people employed has risen respectively: from 593.000 in the year 1981 to 1.165.000 in the year 2000 (Boeßenecker 1998, BAGFW 2001) – thus, the number has almost doubled. The German unification process since 1990 is one reason for this fact, because many social services which previously had been provided by GRD-state agencies have been transferred to social NGOs mainly to members of the six welfare organizations (Angerhausen et. al. 1998, for the entire third sector in eastern Germany see Anheier and Priller 1991, Anheier, Priller and Zimmer 2000). In 1996, the two largest organizations – the church-based Caritas and Diaconia – employed more than 860 000 of the then 1.120 000 employees of all six welfare organizations, i.e. about 75% (Lange 2001:30).

These figures show that the employment rate in the German social sector has risen considerably over the last decades – as it did in the whole third sector (Betzelt 2001). But this has not led to more studies regarding the gender issue in welfare organizations. The few studies available, which will be introduced in more detail later, examine only small entities of the sector. According to their findings women represent between 3/4 and 4/5 of the employees in welfare organizations. They also show that the dominance of women is not mirrored in their representation in (top) management positions – in the contrary. Here are some figures, which illustrate the poor female representation:

- Only one of the six welfare organizations the *Nondenominational Welfare Organization* is represented by a women on the national level.
- Only three out of 24 managing directors of the regional welfare organizations (Landesverbände) under the roof of *Diaconia* are women.
- Seven out of fourteen directors were women when the *Workers’ Welfare Organization* re-established itself in the eastern states of Germany, the former GDR, after the fall of the wall in 1989; by 1994 the top management was all male (Wagner 1994).

But gender is not only a question of female representation (or not-representation) in high managerial positions. It is also a question of how female work is valued by the society at large. Usually, predominately female professions have a low reputation, e.g. nurses and educators (campaigns have not succeeded in changing their image, see e.g. Winter 1997). Another reason why gender should be an issue is the fact that, since women are the majority of employees in the social and health sector as well as manual jobs (like housekeeping, laundry, cleaning), they are particularly affected by down-seizing, outsourcing – generally

into worse working conditions than they used to have – and the overall growing work place insecurity in the field of social and human services.

### **A Brief Look at the Relevant Literature**

To assume that gender does not matter in nonprofit organizations would mean to ignore a whole range of factors and to perpetuate the prevailing andro-centric perspective. Still, gender is not a widespread topic (not only) in German literature dealing with the social sector. Some of the existing literature reflects the employment of women in the so-called third sector in a very global manner (Klammer and Klenner 1999; Notz 2000), but does not relate to social NGOs. Literature about the development of the German welfare state gives some attention to women (e.g. Sachße 1986; Sachße and Tennstedt 1988; Landwehr and Baron 1995). The same holds true for literature about the history of social work until the Second World War including the ‘old’ women’s movement of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century (e.g. Zeller 1994; Eggemann and Hering 1999). From a historical perspective the *Worker’s Welfare Association* is well documented (Eifert 1993) as well as the *Diaconia* (e.g. Hollmach 1995). In literature concerning the present situation, authors focus on social and health service professions as female professions (i.e. Ittermann/Scharfenorth 1996, Karsten, Degenkolb et al. 1999) and on women as volunteers (i.e. Backes 1987; Notz 1998). But again – no reference to social NGOs. Lately, qualitative studies for instance about female social workers in high status positions in the public and in the nonprofit sector have begun to explore the situation of women in leading positions (Schünemann 2001). Only very recently, gender and employment in social services has been combined with the issue of the European integration process (Herrenbrück and Mayer 2002). Thus, the institutional setting and the organizational preconditions seem to become of greater interest for researchers.

### **Affirmative Action Programs**

One method of advancing women into higher and top management levels are affirmative action programs (Frauenförderpläne) and the installation of a women’s representative (Frauenbeauftragte). Affirmative action programs were launched on account of the pressure of the women’s liberation movement, which dates back to the late 1960s/early 1970s. During the 1980s and 1990s such programs became well established instruments in the public sector, in universities and even in some large forprofit enterprises (Krell 1997). But this development barely affected the welfare organizations, although female employees initiated many grass roots activities (see for an example Lange 2001:46f). A telephone survey by the author in the summer of 2000 on the national level revealed that only the protestant *Diaconia* had the position of a women’s representative. The catholic *Caritas* debated ‘women’s issues’ like flexible working hours and balancing work and family in a variety of committees. In other organizations female employees had tried to voice their interest but had not succeeded – at least not in institutionalizing a respective position. Data on this issue from organizations at the regional level and below does not seem to be available or not easily accessible.

### **Findings of Three Studies**

In the following, three studies are being introduced. They vary considerably as to the reasons why they were conducted, the methods employed, the institutional setting and the questions they intend to answer. However, a short excursion about gender and welfare in the German unification process is interspersed: Although the German unification process generated a considerable amount of highly interesting research on welfare organizations and their implementation in the so-called ‘new’ federal states, the former German Democratic Republic (e.g. Angerhausen et al. 1998; Angerhausen 2003), the question of how unification has effected women and their positions in social NPOs –in those welfare organizations that had

existed in the German Democratic Republic (*Diaconia*, *Caritas*, *Red Cross*) or in the others, which were re-established after unification – has not been the subject of research. A qualitative, biographical study (Schiebel 2002) represents an exception to this rule. A study on the general development of female employment during the German transformation process, conducted by the University of the German Armed Forces Hamburg (Domsch and Macke 1999), came to the result that women in the East were pushed back into ‘typically female’ professions, and ‘typically female’ characteristics, which obviously had not existed or had not been relevant in the GDR, were ascribed to women again and used as arguments against females in leading positions and ‘male’ professions.

Back to the three studies about women in welfare organizations. The most elaborate study was conducted about *Diaconia* in the southwestern state of Baden-Württemberg in 1990 (Ames, Kreuzer and Metzler 1991). Member organizations active in the field of hospitals and care for the elderly and the disabled were included in the study, which was carried out through a questionnaire. 1.858 female employees out of 3.740 working in 39 institutions returned the questionnaire. The objective of the study was to collect basic data about the living and working conditions of the female employees in order to identify the reasons for the high fluctuation rate in this field. Here are some of the results the study provided:

- In average 75% of the workforce in the 39 institutions was female.
- The women’s income was at the lower end of the wage scale: only 11,7 % received a higher wage than that of a social worker.
- Men moved into leading managerial positions more easily and much faster than women.
- Women, in contrast, mainly worked in subordinate functions and very often as trainees on the job, but did physically heavy and psychologically difficult work.
- Women filled only 8% of the managerial positions including the lower and middle management levels of wards and departments (although the definition of ‘managerial position’ is difficult as the researcher and the management of the concerned institutions acknowledged).
- Although the employees liked their profession and they liked to work for *Diaconia*, they complained about low wage, time pressure, lack of recognition by their superiors and lack of opportunities to participate in the decision making process.

The study mirrors the hierarchical gender division of labor in the society with women doing the caring and serving and men being in more prestigious, more powerful and better paid positions. To some extent, the outcome is due to the ‘gendered’ field of work it is situated in. However, it leaves the question unanswered why women do not adequately fill in the managerial positions in a female dominated professional field, not even those on the lower and middle level.

In the second study (Allmendinger and Hinz 2000) the position of women in six organizations was examined for comparative purposes. Two organizations belonged to the public sphere (a medical service in the armed forces and a public hospital), two to the for profit sector (a software enterprise and an insurance company) and two to the nonprofit sector (a scientific

institution and a regional welfare organization). Under the umbrella of the welfare organization, which is not named, the number of employees totals more than 5000. The study of this particular organization was conducted as a longitudinal study from 1994 to 1998 and is based on expert interviews, statistics, reports, internal documents. It shows that

- 82% of the employees were women.
- In 1994 women held 29% of the top management positions, but only 21% in 1998.
- As the major reason for the decrease, changes particularly in the social legislature were diagnosed, which had led to the down-seizing and an overall reduction of positions in the organizations.
- The institutionalized affirmative action program for women had proved to be ineffective and obviously had only legitimizing character.

The fact of the decreasing number of women fits well into the organizational-level explanation which says, that while organizations are expanding, additional positions are fairly easily filled with women. When finances are cut back and organizations slim down however, the female manager positions are regularly the first to disappear.

The third study introduced here was conducted at the social work department of the University of Applied Sciences in Hamburg in the winter of 1999/2000 (Mielke 2000). It is small empirical study, a term paper, about the *Diaconia* in the city of Hamburg. There, *Diaconia* assembles about 400 member organizations under its roof. The author collected general information about the organization and interviewed three women in high and middle management positions. She intended to examine the self image of these women as well as their motivation for these positions. Mielke tested several hypothesis which had been formulated in the semester before, like: women do not plan their career; women wait to be “discovered” by their superiors; women in leading positions are usually single and do not have children. Here are some findings of the study:

- The female director is in charge since the beginning of 2001 (she is one of the three female directors of *Diaconia* mentioned earlier in this article), and the whole organization was restructured in a more participatory way; three men, heads the three main departments, are on the board of directors besides her.
- At the next lower hierarchical level (Fachbereichsleitung), which received more administrative competence, the gender distribution itself is fairly even. Mainly men are responsible for the financial and mainly women for the social department.
- The women interviewed had not intended to reach the position they filled.
- Their motivation was not the status of the position but the work content.

A striking feature of the organizational development is the fact that with the new female director the organization itself underwent a change from a rather hierarchical to a more democratic structure. Although on the level of the ‘Fachbereichsleitung’ women and men are represented equally, the study shows that the labor division is ‘traditional’: women are in charge of the (soft) social division and men for the (hard) financial divisions.

### Reflections on Possible Explanations

Why is it, that there are still so few women in (top) management positions in welfare organizations? Why are these organizations unattractive for women to move into higher positions? With the data available, answers to these questions is difficult, but at least some reflections should be shared.

Many women might indeed prefer the direct contact with the clients to the managerial tasks – which is one of the assumptions about individual reasons for women's failure of advancing voiced in literature (see Chernesky 1998). But this does not sufficiently explain the phenomenon. There still seems to be the notorious 'glass ceiling', the invisible and hard to prove barrier, preventing women to reach high status positions.

As another individual reason the greater inflexibility of women is often named. At least as long as the children are small, women in Germany are indeed not as flexible as men concerning working hours, and they often feel torn between their commitment to work and to their family. But the reason for their 'inflexibility' and 'ambivalence' more often than not lies in the fact that they do not have a real choice, because

- in the traditional labor division between women and men, women are still held responsible for the well-being of the children (and husband), and
- the supply of day care centers for children of all age groups is still inadequate. Only about 2% of the toddlers and 42% of the 3-6 year olds are taken care of in day care centers (Stolterfoth 2001).

Even when children get older the structure of schooling (only few schools are open all day) and of after school activities do not allow for an easy reconciliation of work and family scores. Moreover, in Germany the ideology still prevails that women should stay home with their children, and that it is the individual woman's problem to balance job and family if she wants to or has to work. Thus, rather than being an individual reasons, 'inflexibility' and 'ambivalence' has to be diagnosed as a societal reason. And welfare organizations are not only imbedded in, but in many ways part of this structure.

There are also organizational aspects to the poor representation of women in higher levels of the management in the welfare organizations. As mentioned earlier, it is easier for women to reach higher positions at times of expansion, because very often these are new, additional positions, but in the process of down-seizing, these positions are often the first to be abolished.

Another reason could be an inhospitable workplace environment including unfavorable and inflexible working hours, non-existent female role models and a pro-male bias by male *and* female employees in regard to management capabilities. Often unconscious attitudes of men *and* women in the organizations lead to filtered evaluations of the managers' performances according to gender-stereotypes. The beliefs and attitudes may contain convictions such as the stereotype that men are born leaders and women are too emotional; or the application of double standards such as the opinion that when men get loud, they are forceful, but when women get loud, they are hysterical. These are just two, and not even very subtle, examples.

As a summary, it needs to be said, that as far as German welfare organizations are concerned the 'glass ceiling' is still intact. Although there are a few exceptions to the rule, the phenomenon of a women dominated field with a predominantly male leadership prevails.

### **Final Remarks**

Representation research shows that a percentage of at least 20-25% women is necessary to make a difference in organizations, committees etc.. German welfare organizations still have a long way to go in order to make a substantial change regarding women's representation in management positions. Whereas in the US the critical amount of women in these positions if NPOs is surpassed with up to about 50% women (Chernesky 1998), Germany is indeed a 'developing country'. Particularly with the present situation in Germany, the financial constraints and the tendency to reduce the number of positions, there does not seem to be much hope for an equal representation of women and men on the various managerial levels. Still, from the view point of gender democracy – as an important feature of democracy – an adequate representation of women in management positions of social NPOs is not only desirable but urgent.

The question arises if gender mainstreaming as a top-down process could be helpful. For social NGOs in the European context this strategy is mainly noticeable in the European funding programs they use. But since gender mainstreaming is not only a European but also a national strategy, its vigorous implementation might help to promote women's advancement and an improved general evaluation of 'typically female' work as an issue for the welfare organizations.

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**Author's Address:**

Dr phil Chris Lange  
EFB- Evangelical School of Applied Science Berlin  
Teltower Damm 118-122  
D-14167 Berlin  
Germany

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& Society**