Gendering the Academy and Research: combating Career Instability and Asymmetries

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Implementation Challenges in Structural Change Projects: learnings from GARCIA

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Topic of the presentation

• Reflection on the process of implementation
  – Discussing the main challenges
  – Supporting factors to deal with and overcome these challenges and threats
  – Lessons learnt
    • For implementation processes and teams
    • For policy design
Empirical Basis

• Results are based on the evaluation of the GARCIA project
• It is a more qualitative evaluation approach
  – More focused on the process of implementation
  – Not so much on outputs and outcomes (too early to measure)
• Presented results ...
  – Are mainly based on semi-structured interviews
  – Target groups:
    • GARCIA implementation teams
    • Collaborators
  – Two different times: Ex-ante and ex-post interviews
  – Aggregated level of analysis: not individual institutions but a more synthesized picture of experiences and observations
  – Selected and preliminary results as we are still in the process of analysing the ex-post interviews
Observations

- GARCIA was designed as an action research project
- Heterogeneity of organisations in terms of ...
  - The awareness for gender (in)equalities
  - The level of implemented gender equality policies
- Most of GARCIA team members are researchers
  - At different career stages: from PhD students to full professors
  - Have different goals, motivations and resources
- Hardly any administrative personnel was part of the GARCIA implementation team
  - Like gender equality officers, HR officers
- Changes in management (rectors, deans, head of departments)
Challenges

• Building links between GARCIA implementation team and organizational structures
  – Alignment with ongoing policy discourses and processes
  – Coordination with established structures and staff
  – Access to decision making committees
• Strong commitment and support of management
  – Only a formal commitment
  – Changes of management
  – Lack of time and often of interest or awareness
• Limited knowledge of organizational change processes
• Implementation activities do not count for career success
Challenges

• Perception of GARCIA as ...
  – competitor or intruder
    • Not recognized as support or opportunity
  – Research project
    • Not recognized as aiming for structural change

• Consequences:
  – Building up parallel structures and activities
  – can lead to resistance and non-cooperation
  – Hardly any influence on the organizational structures
  – localized, restricted level of implementation
  – In the long run: sustainability?
Supportive factors

• Nomination/promotion of GARCIA team members into decision making positions
  – Power to influence agenda setting and decision making processes
  – But also into other committees or interest groups that allowed to promote the GARCIA objectives
• Making use of informal network ties
  – Reputation of senior scientists within organization
• Broad stakeholder engagement: Finding allies/change agents
  – Establishment of a task force or coordination group
  – External stakeholders or policy makers
• Support by top level management
  – Acceptance is not enough
• Provision of data and expertise
  – Evidence based policy development
Lessons learnt

• How to secure support of top level management?
  – Formal letter of support is an insufficient instrument
  – Other ways are needed to secure or even enforce the commitment
    • Supported by the EC?
• Participatory design and stakeholder involvement
  – From the beginning on
  – Formal process is more effective (task force or coordination group)
  – Time consuming process to establish an effective and recognized implementation team
• Who is targeted by structural change calls?
  – Are researchers the right group for implementing such projects?
  – What kind of expertise is needed?
Concluding Remarks

• Nevertheless ...
  – Structural change projects can make a difference
    • produce a lot of organizational knowledge
    • can trigger changes
    • But concrete impacts will only be visible in the long run
  – Projects are an opportunity to learn and self-reflection
    • But only if it is observed/evaluated
    • Focus not on outcomes and impacts but on practices and process
    • How can we make use of this knowledge in the future?

• But ...
  – Sustainability remains the main challenge
    • Start thinking about sustainability in the planning phase already
    • Inclusion of sustainability plans or concepts in the proposal should be mandatory
  – How could research institutions be supported in their endeavour to make actions sustainable?
THANK YOU VERY MUCH FOR YOUR ATTENTION!

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