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Women along the Danube as Agents of Change

Zusammenfassung:

Der Beitrag ist ein Vorabdruck aus der Studie „Gender Relations in Education: Policy and Practice in the Danube Region. Experiences, Analyses, and Impulses“, die von der Europäischen Donau-Akademie (Ulm) in Auftrag gegeben und von der Baden-Württemberg Stiftung (Stuttgart) finanziell unterstützt wurde. Die wissenschaftliche Leitung liegt bei Dagmar Engels, Ulmer Volkshochschule. Die Projektleitung hat Nadezhda Aleksandrova, Erziehungswissenschaftlerin an der Universität Sofia, Bulgarien. Es geht in dem Beitrag um Genderperspektiven in Südosteuropa mit dem besonderen Blick auf den Bereich von Bildung und Erziehung. Methodisch stehen Interviews mit Fachwissenschaftlerinnen und Gender-Expertinnen aus sechs Donaustaaten – Bulgarien, Deutschland, Ungarn, Rumänien, Serbien, Ukraine – im Mittelpunkt. Die Studie wird Ende 2012 im Verlag Klemm+Oelschläger (Ulm) in Englisch publiziert.

Schlüsselworte: *Genderforschung im Donaauraum, Erziehung, Bildung, Frauen als „agents of change“*

Abstract:

The contribution is a preprint of the study “Gender Relations in Education: Policy and Practice in the Danube Region. Experiences, Analyses, and Impulses” that was launched by the European Danube Academy (Ulm) and that was given financial support by the Baden-Württemberg Stiftung (Stuttgart). The scientific coordinator of the project is Dagmar Engels, Ulmer Volkshochschule (adult education center Ulm); the project management is carried out by Nadezhda Aleksandrova, educationalist at the University of Sofia. The contribution deals with gender perspectives in South-Eastern Europe with particular regard on the fields of training and education. Methodologically, the contribution focuses on interviews with scientists and gender experts from six Danube countries – Bulgaria, Germany, Hungary, Romania, Serbia and Ukraine. The study will be published in English language by Klemm+Oelschläger (Ulm) at the end of 2012.

Keywords: *Gender Research in the Danube Area, Education, Women as „Agents of Change“*

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Rivers are both a common source supply and a natural divide between territories. In the light of the enlargement process of the European Union the river Danube has been rather a powerful liaison between the nations that are situated in its basin, than a dividing factor. The European Danube strategy towards interconnectedness and macroregionality¹ has made possible the establishment of research networks whose goal is the prosperity of all citizens who live along the Danube shores.

The Women's Danube Network plays an active role in this effort and one of its most successful projects is the collection of interviews “Women along the Danube as agents of change”, created as a result of the research project “Gender Relations in Education: Policy and Practice in the Danube Region. Experiences, Analyses, and Impulses” (2010-2011).² The collection „Women along the Danube as agents of change” is the first endeavor of a research group, gathered on the principle of Danubian macroregionality, to make visible and promote the work of remarkable women, empowered by their own career development to act in favor of promoting gender mainstreaming in education. Gender experts, interviewers and translators from six Danube countries – Bulgaria, Germany, Hungary, Romania, Serbia, Ukraine have prepared thirteen interviews with women agents of social change from the above-mentioned countries. The interviews present women who contributed in different ways to the process of raising awareness on gender equality and in regard to the different modes of teaching gender. In the spectrum of the interviewee's profiles there are women politicians, executive managers, women from minority groups, women who actively work on gender mainstreaming in the NGO sector, and women from the academia. All interviewees contemplate on the visibility of the implementation of gender equality policies in education, and more broadly on the equal access of men and women to education that guarantee more possibilities for career development.

Intersectionality, interconnectivity and intersubjectivity

The main idea of the volume is to act as an alternative source of information for the gender policies in the field of education in the respective six Danube countries. It enriches the existing studies and reports on gender mainstreaming in education. The

private memories and public standpoints contain also criticism of the present gender policies and suggestions for better results. The collection can serve as a teaching tool that accounts for the long-term policies established in Germany and for the recent gender history of the countries from Central and Eastern Europe. It includes rare accounts from some of the founders of the first gender studies programs in this region and presents the conviction of women who have gained access to local and national power structures of the importance of gender balance in its intersection with class, race, ethnicity and territory. The interviewees demonstrate awareness that the social equilibrium can be achieved only if the policies grant parallel treatment of the factors, which create dominance of some groups and disadvantage of others.

The collection “Women along the Danube as agents of change” can initiate discussions on the “distorted continuity between generations of women” (Petó and Waaldijk 2006, p. 26) who could identify with the interviewees’ positions and overcome the resistance to feminism and women’s movements that exists in the post-socialist countries due to the degrading “bourgeois” label that such discourses gained. The volume initiates interconnectedness between past and future generations of gender activists in the region and between the researchers who deal with gender mainstreaming in education in the Danube region.

The research practice of adding experience to the data, of adding private accounts of those omitted or overlooked from the official sources to the public history has become a common method in feminist history and sociology. The private accounts challenge official representations of events and share the experience of the effects of mainstream policies. The study of human experience “has produced a wealth of new evidence previously ignored about these others and has drawn attention to dimensions of human life and activity usually deemed unworthy of mentioning in conventional histories” (Scott 1992, p. 22–40). The present collection of interviews is an effort to assemble official discourses on gender mainstreaming in education with the experience of women witnesses of events and subject of controversial policies. Surely, the analysis of the interview material considers the dangers inherent in taking the account of a certain situation on a national scale from a small number of informers. The subjective opinions of the respondents do not tend to reveal a “universal truth”. On the contrary, the points of divergence from the officially pronounced measures and policies in the field of gender mainstreaming are a basis for explaining the reasons for. But the difference of perspective while the design of the questionnaire has another strategic value. It lies in the effort to try to historicize the experience of the fore-mothers of the gender studies programs in the region or to dwell with the personal and political histories of women – who have achieved political and social power and who are willing to exercise it in favor of sustaining gender equality principles. In the light of a historical change of the fall of Socialism that happened in Central and Eastern Europe in the late 1980s the collection „Women along the Danube as agents of change” is one of the few efforts to reveal a subjectivity of a woman leader or/and gender expert. The research team’s leading notion is that the interviews display the women’s agency and gender consciousness. The very interview can act as a stimulus for action because it can activate critical thinking and change long-lasting positions.

The volume “Women along the Danube as agents of change” initiates continuity with the long-lasting urge for emancipation, which existed in the nations along the river in the past three centuries. When the 19th-century Bulgarian writer from the 19th c Ivan Bogorov discussed the progress of the newborn nations that appeared out of the imperial context of the Habsburgs and the Ottomans in this part of the Danube region he said: “Danube carries along golden sand and one should envy those diggers who find out how to collect it”. Bogorov implied the capacity for communication, trade and cultural exchange. Beside the traffic of goods and labor force, the river Danube served as means for the transportation of culture in Europe. The very notion of modernity was linked to the river. For instance, the cities on the coast of Danube were the first in the European part of the Ottoman Empire that undertook a western lifestyle in architecture, furniture, cinemas and newspapers, theatre performances and printing (Ditchev 2007).

In the past women from the Danube coast were very active in establishing women’s organizations and they readily took part in the public life of the community. Topics, such as the equal opportunities for men and women to have access to education and same curricula were part of the emancipation discourse. The collection volume “Women along the Danube as agents of change” returns to this topic enriching its capacity and updating its contents with contemporary policies and forms of gender inequality.

The countries situated on the coast of the Danube have a long and complex history and women are inseparable part of it. Therefore to provide a possibility of articulating the social changes that happened to this region not only in the distant past but more specifically in the recent present (the past twenty years since the Fall of Socialism) is urgent and necessary. The women-interviewees in this collection recall their own personal battles for achieving career success, but they also contemplate on the collective Socialist past and the position of women and men under political and social oppression.

Streams of Narrating Experience

The metaphor of the stream indicates also the dynamics of consciousness. The interview can be regarded as a narrative product of such a stream. Even if the questions are standard for all interviewees, the answers evoke different memories in each respondent. The narrative dimension refers to the fact that the life story aims to account for the whole of the informant’s life experience until the moment of the interview. This means that the narrative encompasses not only temporal and causal organization of facts but also the value of judgments that make sense of this particular life experience (Chanfrault-Duchet 1991, p. 77). The constructed selfperceptions of the speaking subject urge him/her to identify or distance from the topic of discussion. There are many factors that influence the interview situation and the answers given – the sequence of questions, the influence of the figure of the interviewer, the language of the interview, the language of the analysis, etc.

The research team took into consideration all these factors and prepared the questionnaire, the transcripts and their translations according to previously agreed general points. They follow the main idea of the collection to enrich the existing studies and question the general statements by providing concrete

experiences of women who embrace the cause of gender mainstreaming in education. Moreover, the interviews reveal the perception of the interviewees as subjects, capable of action. By displaying women's capacity for agency the collection gives understanding of the politics of gendered remembering. The life histories of the interviewees – stories of struggle and success – align with the official history of the region of Central and Eastern Europe. As a result of this politics of remembering the collection is designed to promote women from these Danube countries who deserve appreciation for their active civic standpoints. In doing so, the collection generates gendered remembering of singularities among the prospective readers. Therefore, the research team is certain that the collection “Women along the Danube as agents of change” can serve as a teaching tool or a source for women mentors who can inspire women to formulate and achieve their own life objectives.

As a result of these guiding principles the questionnaire was designed in two sections. The first one consists of questions related to the interviewee's recollection of decisive moments from her years of education and accomplishment. The second contains inquiries of the women's public activism in the field of gender and/or education and her standpoint on the existing policies of gender mainstreaming in education. The logic of the interview situation is that it starts with apparently easy questions about the interviewee's own educational background and her experience (if there is at all) with gender inequality. The answers provide another perspective to the educational system coming from the respondents' own experience. Then the second section of the questionnaire adds a personal perspective to public policies and puts on trial the visibility of existing policies on gender mainstreaming in education on a national scale.

In the first section of questions the interviewee is encouraged to recall decisive moments of her period of learning that have influenced her professional development. The answers reveal the envisioned goals of the woman and her ways to achieve them – alone or with the help of supporters, collaborators, partners, etc. This section does not lead directly to the topic of gender mainstreaming in education but it gathers impressions about the structure and functions of the national educational system over a period of 20–30 years. Moreover, the answers to the questions of this section express the interviewees' leadership abilities and more importantly of the ability of critical judgment of past decisions. Sometimes these first questions manage to open the curtain of the interviewee's private world – her family and friends. They also show how the interviewee applies her understanding of gender equality among her colleagues, employees or students.

They entail a process of reasoning of past events and a search for the origins of the present status. The sequence of questions about the interviewee's choices can provoke a process of identification with social causes, driven from observation of the suffering of others. They provide another perspective to the educational system coming from their own communication with victims of social exclusion. The questions from the first section are designed to encourage the women's reflection on her career track but also of the (educational) disadvantages of others.

From this revision of past events the focus of the interview moves to the central question about the women's own contribution to the struggle against gender inequality. This is the last

question of the first section. It is designed to make a smooth transition to the second field of inquiry about the national policies that exist in the country.

In the second section the focus of the interview lies upon the governmental and non-governmental policies, which exist in each of the country as well as in other countries which can provide best practices to follow. In addition the second section contains questions about the possibility to provide equal educational opportunities to women and men from underprivileged groups – such as the disabled people, migrants or representatives of minority groups.

Another idea behind the design of the second set of question is to encourage the respondent to criticize or approve elements of the present policies of gender mainstreaming. In order to emphasize the personal investment into the political issue the team designed a question, which resembles one from the first part – “Are you personally involved in any activities for promotion of gender equality through education?” The repetition however is deliberate. It achieved another set of answers when it is situated among references to social activism of these women. It worked well for the interview of the Bulgarian Natalya Kasnelcheva, who is a manager without special gender experience but with an influence in the process of decision making in the Ruse region. The first time when she was asked about her attitude to gender equality issues, she did not identify with such policies. But the second time she was much more active in pointing out organizations and institutions that deal with gender, equal opportunities and discrimination.

The second part of the questionnaire ends with the invitation of the interviewees to make recommendations. Some of them address their concerns to the family as the space where most of the stereotypes and gender roles are formed. Others criticized the lower level of gender sensitivity of policy makers and educators, which re-inscribe the stereotypical behaviours of men and women when they teach or prepare legal documents. Some other interviewees refer to the role of media and social networks in making the existing problems visible and create forums of discussion and support of victims. All of the interviewees however are convinced that the sphere of education is far from being gender balanced. The interviewees insist on gender programs and courses and trainings that could raise gender awareness among students but also among policy makers and media experts. Course curricula as well as teaching materials should contain gender sensitive topics. All recommendations of the interviewees were taken into account and included in the final report of the project “Gender Relations in Education: Policy and Practice in the Danube Region. Experiences, Analyses, and Impulses”.

Another methodological issue, related to the concept of change is the subjective position of the interviewee as a narrator, whose testimony undergoes a process of transcription, translation and interpretation. The moment of the interview itself is a unique situation of intersubjective relations between the interviewer and the respondent that can influence the narration. The choice of a standard interview is an effort to put all interviewees under the same “brain chain”. However, the answers contain similarities but are also very diverse because each narration is a discursive action of retrieval of past events and emotions, presented according to present circumstances. The presentation of diverse interviews in a collection that aims at convergence towards

shared ideas of gender equality is a projection of a consciously utopian perspective (Passerini 2007, p. 251) in which intersubjectivity and interconnectivity are the basis for creation of a productive environment for researchers who deal with the analyses the social factors for building prosperity in the Danube region.

The question of the language of the interview and of the transcript is also very important. All interviews are tape-recorded, transcribed and translated into English. Due to the six different languages spoken in the research team, English was chosen as the working language and it served as a mediator also for the interpretation of the interview material. If the transcription is already a transformation of form and meaning – from oral to written even though the transcript is as close as possible to the oral flow – the translation to another language is an additional intervention in the testimony. The texts which then form the data for our analysis are thereby constructed by multiple interventions: first, the construction of the sample itself through networks of different subjects, then the relationship between the interviewer and the interviewee, then the actions of transcribers and translators, and finally the viewpoints of the reader in trying to analyse the accounts.

In our work, the researchers who share the same language as the interviewees continued to act as mediators between the different passages to help colleagues understand the resonances of meaning within the interviews. This was especially important in order to understand better all social phenomena to which the interviewees refer and promote their work better in places where their names have not yet become popular in relation to gender activism. The careful consideration of all factors in the preparation of the testimonies in this collection leads to the possibility to interpret the interview material according to different topics. Among the most interesting ones are the identification to feminism and gender activism; the selfhistory of their own career development and their opinion on the ways in which the gender variable should be included in the educational process.

Women agents of change

The interviewees in this collection are selected according to the general presumption of the research team that this is a small pilot effort in presenting the stories of success and empowerment of women from several countries in the Danube region. Therefore, this project does not reveal so much the stories of women/men from disadvantaged groups although the intersectionality of factors that produce unfavorable social labeling are embedded in the logic of the questionnaire. The volume gathers singular perspectives on what has been achieved so far in the realm of gender policies in education in the respective chosen countries, and in what ways women have contributed to the gender history in this region so far.

The selection process was made according to several criteria. We targeted women whose life story and professional background are connected with the main focus of the study – the ways in which gender matters in the process of education and the advantage of those who have developed awareness of the equal opportunities of men and women when it comes to career choice, occupation and payment. The team of researchers tried to diversify the sample as much as possible.

One large group of interviewees consists of women who have achieved a high professional score and now influence the

process of decision-making in regional/national policies. These are Natalya Kasnedelcheva/Bulgaria, Dagmar Höppel/Germany, Ágnes Osztyolkán/Hungary, Monica Vanda Munteanu/Romania, Danica Todorov/Serbia, Kateryna Levchenko/Ukraine.

Another group of interviewees includes those who work predominantly as teachers and educators. They are founders of gender studies programs; develop curricula of courses on gender; give lectures and organize trainings and work in international projects that deal with gender mainstreaming. Such interviewees are Violeta Petrova/Bulgaria, Katya Kansteiner-Schänzlin/Germany, Mónika Szabó/Hungary, Mihaela Miroiu and Doina Olga Stefanescu/Romania, Svenka Savić/Serbia, Olena Semikolenova/Ukraine.

A lot of the women are active in the civic sector – Violeta Petrova, Doina Olga Stefanescu, Olena Semikolenova, and others. The collection includes reflections on the factors which prevent the harmonization of the communication between the governmental structures, the civic sector and the academic programs that include gender courses in their curricula. The women account for their role as mediators between politicians, society and the educational institutions and despite the big financial problems in the gender-oriented NGO sector in the recent years, there are positive examples. One of them comes from Bulgaria, where the suggestions for changes in the history textbooks, and in the national educational standards are coordinated between the Office of Equal Opportunities at the Ministry of Education, and NGOs that deal with gender in education.

Some of the women in the collection are very famous in their countries for their participation in politics. Their achievements have cultivated in them patience, strength and determination – qualities, which have shaped their perception of life as “a struggle” or as a question of “both chance and hard work”. Their experience on the ladder of power is indicative of their self-perception as active women for whom equality is a right, naturally given, socially necessary and personally exercised. Among them there are women who are public figures but experience the hardships of being representatives of underprivileged groups (such as the Roma activist and MP Ágnes Osztyolkán). Other interviewees have suffered from the economic crisis of the period of transition to democracy and now face the pressure of being nonconformist to governments that neglect previously implemented policies of gender mainstreaming in education (i.e. Monica Munteanu, Katerina Levchenko). Their speech is often rhetorically cautious. Their manners are trained to hide weaknesses and cover the stories of setbacks with various techniques – such as quotations, jokes, proverbs or examples, which might lead the answer to a safer topic. The analysis of their interviews shows that most often their political engagement is not for the sake of profit but of values, as they do not permeate easily into the anonymous group clapping followers of a political decree. The accounts of those politically active women in the collection “Women along the Danube as agents of change” can serve the purpose of the research to attract new activists who want to participate in the making of political decisions and can obtain experience and conclusions from the remarkable women-politicians in this volume. Furthermore, the Women’s Danube Network can enlarge in numbers and in spectrum of professional background by women who felt inspired by reading the stories, included in the collection.

The interviewees have witnessed both the Socialist era and the post-socialist transition period. Moreover, they have various competences in philosophy, political science, mathematics, law, literature, pedagogy, language, and even agriculture. Natalya Kaznedelcheva decided to study law after graduating economics, Svenka Savić has specialized linguistics, Violeta Petrova was outracing all boys at sports classes, and Dagmar Höppel grew up with the skills of driving a tractor at the age of five. They claim that a child should be brought up with the idea of gender equality and then the later forms of institutional education can only confirm this mind-set. But equally decisive and continuously influential is the knowledge about equality and diversity, which the student learns during his/her process of education. Empowering individuals from underprivileged groups and getting to know the history of those groups can contribute to the process of building up democratic societies.

Modes of experiencing gender inequality and modes of teaching gender equality

Feminism and gender activism have become part of the social positioning of the women in the collection. The interviews contain variety of stories – stories of gender-awakening, stories of gendered remembering, stories of self-empowerment. Criticism to national policies, personal disappointments and political battles enrich the spectrum of narration in the thirteen interviews. The grand political events that happened in this region in the past two decades resonate in the sound of the private recollections.

For the interviewees from the lower Danube coast there is one common feature – the memories of the Socialist period. In the countries from Central and Eastern Europe after 1945 the constitutions put on paper the glorious achievement of equality for all, and feminism was excluded as a feature of the “capitalist” societies. All organizations, journals and exhibitions of Western life-style were condemned. The feminist identity was attributed only to Western middle class liberal women, whereas the exemplary working woman of the Socialist society had to overfulfil her workplan and still remain a good mother and wife. In practice throughout the Socialist period the women’s choices for professions were not so rich as it was proclaimed in the initial decade of urbanization and collectivization of the land. The double burden became heavier as they had to obey the Party decrees, the whims of their husbands, and the orders, coming from multiple directions of the hierarchical structure of their workplace.

During this era the Romanian interviewee Monica Munteanu discovered that reading and learning could be a private form of escape from the reality of deprivation. The “stack of books and papers were wonderful camouflage” from the school system, which she perceived as a totalitarian instrument of producing loyal followers of the regime. Another Romanian activist Mihaela Miroui considers the end of the Socialist period as a liminal time in regard to her becoming one of Romania’s most prominent political theorists, a feminist and a philosopher. When she was asked about the personal investment of efforts and qualities for achieving the position she answered:

“My career track is related to work, endowment, beliefs, values, but also the fall of communism. Without democracy I could have done almost nothing besides teaching in my area of interest (social sciences and political studies).”

The discourse of resistance to the junction between communist ideology and educational practice is not so strong in the account of the Bulgarian interviewee Violeta Petrova. Her leadership abilities were acknowledged as early as she became a member of the pioneer organization. She has developed good communication and organizational skills and reacted very positively to the experience, which she had gained from her school years. She correlates her personal advancement with the advancement of the teaching methodology during the later Socialist period. Recalling a conference from the late 1970s about “The Students as subjects of the educational process”, Violeta Petrova claimed that the desire for a system which transforms the object of education into subjects of knowledge had been present already then. Unfortunately she thinks that this transformation has not been achieved yet.

Violeta is very comfortable while speaking of the multiple activities related to gender but confessed that her interest in the matter was “a combination of chance and logic.” She got acquainted with the concept of gender a decade ago through her work in non-governmental organizations in the town of Veliko Turnovo. Her contacts with women from minority groups and women victims of violence in Bulgaria revealed the multiple forms of inequality, which otherwise remain hidden for the white, middle-class working citizens. Violeta realized that in order to help women and men to receive equal treatment and rely on equal chances for education and occupation she must continue supporting the cause of gender-sensitive education not only by trainings and project work, but also through changes in the educational standards for teaching civic education at secondary school level. Violeta Petrova is a co-editor and author of several teaching materials. They focus on civic education at secondary school level and at the university and introduce to the young students gender-related concepts in a provocative and interactive way.

The Ukrainian interviewee Katerina Levchenko recalls a similar story of awakening. In the 1990s she still believed that “all people are equal.” The times of the first democratic changes in Ukraine coincided with the defence of her PhD. thesis. When she got acquainted with feminist and post-structuralist concepts (in the works of Roland Barthes, Michel Foucault, Julia Kristeva, the Russian thinkers Valery Podoroga, Olga Voronina, Tatyana Klimentkova) her perspective broadened and she could easily detect the vulnerability of those who are socially stigmatized and recognize various forms of discrimination.

She includes in her answer about her history of awakening a very emotional story of the times when she had already achieved academic success but was still treated discriminatively when it came to biology and reproduction. Her confidence of becoming a PhD. at the age of 26 was drastically ruined by a woman gynecologist who refused to examine her at the appointed hour without a special reason. Her academic achievements became an object of mockery. She was told that “she is nobody” – just a pregnant woman, vulnerable and patient as all other women of her situation. That meeting at the gynecologist’s convinced Kateryna Levchenko to work for the prevention of any form of discrimination against women. Later on she not only continued her academic career in the field of gender studies but also founded the organization “La Strada center”. Now it is widespread in the country and has a team of 200 trainees from 16 regions of Ukraine. Her team examines the gender aspect in any

topic they deal with human trafficking, violation of children's rights, domestic violence, etc.

The Roma activist and MP Ágnes Osztolykán also presents her life as a struggle for social recognition. She put herself in the position of a girl from a Roma family to count the instances in which such a girl from a rural district and lower social class will not have the same opportunities to get educated as a girl from another ethnicity, class, and setting. The traditional family structure and the rigidity of stereotypes of women as mothers and housewives is strong within the Roma community. Even for an ambitious and diligent girl it is very hard to resist the pressure from her family and more generally from the society. Ágnes Osztolykán's own ethnicity began to matter more when she became a student in Political Science at the University of Miskolc. "There it was already very important who I was, that I am Roma, what kind of political thinking I have or what kind I don't have. I encountered many times situations in which I had to defend Roma society itself against distorted, scapegoating thoughts. Thus, I had to decide there and then what and how [I would do]".

In Serbia Svenka Savić also works on several initiatives for the education of Roma women. One of them is methodological and pedagogical instruction for Roma teachers, and another is a program for assigning mentors to young Roma women who are willing to continue their education and need role models to assist them in escaping from (what Monica Munteanu from Romania called) the "genuine vicious circle" – "the marginalization produced by the multiple deficits in living conditions creates/supports prejudices and discriminatory attitudes that worsen social exclusion, negatively impact the participation in education and significantly decrease the opportunities to integrate on the labor market."

Monica Munteanu from Romania and Danica Todorov from Vojvodina, Serbia have been very active politically in the defense of women's rights. The former is founding member at „EVALROM" – Romanian Evaluation Association (NGO) and also former Head of the Public Policy Unit at the Ministry of Education and Research in Romania. The latter is a Deputy Ombudsperson in charge of gender equality for the province of Vojvodina. Both women emphasize the difficulty to convince decisionmakers of the importance of intersectionality in the governmental offices that implement equal opportunities policies. Monica Munteanu is critical of the established Office for Gender Equality in Education at the Ministry of Education in Romania calling it a "stillborn" structure. She comments on the budget cuts in that sector and expresses disapproval of policies both on the national and local level. In her view the local administration often resembles to "mini-Mafia or groups of economical-family-personal interests".

Danica Todorov is also determined to act for the protection of all individuals whose human rights are jeopardized. She defines her contribution to gender equality as continuous efforts of "incorporation of gender equality in each and every policy, as well as to ensure that those in power not only make decisions and policies but also implement them in a systematic way". These claims are often regarded by politicians "as a feminist fight for women's domination". Clearly the term still has negative connotations. Therefore, Danica Todorov considers gender education, campaigns and trainings as very necessary for women from underprivileged groups, for educators and for policy makers.

In the same train of thoughts are the recommendations of the German professor and politician Dagmar Höppel. From her experience as a participant in a number of national and regional educational advisory boards in the State of Baden-Württemberg she is convinced that neither the academic staff nor the society are fully aware of the advantages of the principle of gender balance in committees and departments. She encourages more women to join power structures at universities so that women's interests are addressed correctly. Yet, her concern is also about men students whose academic results are lower than those of the girls. This is a lasting tendency according to the recent studies whose long term effects can endanger gender equality. The PISA research shows a big discrepancy of the results between the 15-year-old girls and boys in three areas of learning – reading, mathematics and natural sciences. Sometimes the score of the girls is compared to one year difference in the learning abilities between the boys and the girls. The study implies a "warning to advanced economies that they cannot take for granted that they will forever have 'human capital' superior to that in other parts of the world".³ At a time of intensified global competition, they will need to work hard to secure knowledgeable workforce.

Another problem comes from the clash between the patriarchal social structure and the continuous improvement of the competences of women in comparison to the declining learning results of men. It can lead to a great controversy in the job market where traditionally men obtain positions of power whereas women tend to occupy low income jobs that allow them to practice their "genuine functions" of caretakers. The rigidity of this patriarchal structure causes a clash between expectations and career opportunities for women. Their big educational accomplishments do not presuppose an adequate career and income. If gender mainstreaming policies are not taken to secure gender balance in learning, the combination between incompetence and power can have negative impact on the whole society.

The interview of the Ukrainian professor Olena Semikolenova contains another episode of similar discriminative attitude. It is the moment when she competed for a position in the Russian language department at the University of Simferopol. When the chair of the department understood that her second child is just a few months old he preferred a male candidate over her because "all those sick leaves, maternity leaves would lead to absence of desire to work". Finally, when it turned out that the other candidate was an alcohol addict she was invited to take the position. At present Olena Semikolenova is determined to fight against any kind of gender discrimination. Her guiding method is teaching from experience. Her conviction is that the personal example makes the point of the trainer stronger. In order to teach gender awareness, one has to gather his/her own "pained and experienced convictions" so that the students can feel and think over the specific situations of discrimination. This interviewee has a strong argument in teaching gender with memories and teaching gender by historicizing the emotions and affections that were a result of one's own experience.

Svenka Savić remembered the resistance of some faculty members to accept the gender studies program. She is the founder of the first gender studies interdepartment program at the University of Novi Sad and for her it was easier to overcome the bureaucratic obstacles than to convince the colleagues of the importance of such a field of humanities. The quotation from

her interview is indicative for the good conflict resolution qualities of the Rector (The University rector was Fuada Stankovic) who supported the new program.

“And then the Dean of the Faculty of Physical Education, who teaches Boxing, by the way, gets the floor and says: “Don't tell me that now we'll call science those suffragettes' things?!” I remember that very well, he's departed now; he died two or three years ago. And I started rising up from my chair, ready to protest, when Fuada Stankovic [the female Rector] signaled me with her eyes that everything was fine, and said : “Thank you very much, are there any more comments? No? Then let's vote if we will call them Gender Studies”. And everybody raised their hands in favor. In short, our Rector's good will and diplomacy were very useful.

This rather long quotation is an entrance to a whole terminological dilemma of applying the concept of “gender” in teaching. “Women's studies” is simultaneously related to the negative connotations of feminism whereas “Gender studies” do not evoke such associations. “Gender studies” is also a title, which “aims at greater objectivity by suggestion a higher level of scientific precision” (Pető & Waaldijk 2010, p. 26) and perhaps these are some of the reasons for the popularity of the title across the universities in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe.

The interviewees who teach at universities confess that it is much more often to introduce a gender related course at their department than to handle logistically and financially a gender program. Beside the courses in the existing programs at their universities, most of the interviewees try to include gender aspects in the courses they teach in other departments.

The Romanian professor Doina Olga Stefanescu teaches gender at several settings. She has courses for MA students at the university, works as a trainer for secondary school teachers, and communicates with parents' associations. The opportunity to develop gender sensitivity in the parents of the pupils is very important as the family is the first instance for building tolerance towards all forms of otherness. Referring to the level of secondary education this interviewee shares her observations of the reinforcement of the already existing stereotypes when the children discuss gender issues with their classmates and teachers. She has noticed that at first the students have an inclination to choose a great variety of professions but the teachers in fact are those, who continuously reproduce the distinctions between boys and girls and in doing so they are narrowing the students' choices. The textbooks and the other teaching materials are often not sensitive to gender issues and contribute to the process of coining the stereotypical gender roles among the students. Therefore one of the most common recommendations is that the textbooks at primary and secondary level should be edited so that women as well as men are equally present in history, literature, and all areas of knowledge from which one of the sexes has been excluded until recently.

In a similar stance the social psychologists Mónika Szabó from Hungary elaborates at length how the educational system provides comparatively equal amount of knowledge for boys and girls but then they often lack guidance in career orientation and skills development. She observes the prevalence of the prejudice that the working woman should be also a good mother and wife, investing more of her time as a caretaker than in making a career. The interviewee makes a strong argument about the

rigidity of this prejudice by giving an example from her own family situation:

... when my child is sick, his father and me stay at home taking turns depending on who can better reorganize duties and obligations to be absent from the workplace. We both teach at university. Then when once my husband did not go in one day because of this, his then boss, a woman, asked him showing incomprehension and reproof “But does this child have no mother?” She knows me, too, we are colleagues.

Another interviewee -the German professor Katja Kansteiner-Schänzlin presents an opposite case of understanding and respect. When she describes her career development she remembers vividly the support of her male mentor and professor in times when she was uncertain about her academic future. The mentor's urge was decisive for her present professional sphere. She confesses that the balance between child raising and making a career requires the sacrifice to have spare time for chatting and shopping with friends. However, she appreciates her achievement and recommends the practice of mentoring. There is a necessity of encouragement of women and men to continue learning and take the advantage of the methods and practices of life long learning. The state policies should act in favor of promoting those types of education but the individual should also make efforts for better results.

Many of the interviewees in this collection reflect on the impact of the women's own will and choice for empowerment. Yet, along with their liberal thinking the interviewees do not exclude the value of coincidence. When Doina Olga Stefanescu speaks of her choices she refers to the saying “the necessity always pairs off with chance”. For the Bulgarian interviewee Natalya Kasnedelcheva the only coincidence is the fact that she started working in a wine factory in Ruse on the Danube River. But she climbed the ladder of success and reached the position of the executive manager of the winery. At present Natalya is one of the few women in the Managing Council of the National Vine and Wine Chamber in Bulgaria. Her place in the collection of women agents of change from the Danube region is related to the image of the woman of power who is becoming gender aware. She claims that she provides equal chances for her male and her female employees when it comes to selection of new candidates for positions or of assigning new tasks. In contrast to many other interviewees in this collection Natalya Kasnedelcheva represents the business woman who does not know much about gender mainstreaming in education. She has participated several times in elections and can be influential in local municipal policy of the Bulgarian Danube region. Natalya's perspective reveals the actual level of visibility of national campaigns for gender mainstreaming among women who can make a difference but are still not very active. It becomes obvious from her answers that those programs and policies are not as visible as they should be despite the hard work of the civic sector and the reports of the equal opportunities office at the Ministry of Education and Science. The interview of Natalya Kasnedelcheva reveals that still much should be done to distinguish the status of underprivileged groups whose problems are invisible behind the glass ceiling.

The diversity of profiles in the collection “Women along the Danube as agents of change” aims at the multiplication of the stories of success and at the multifaceted perspective to gender policies in education. The liaisons between the inter-

viewee's attitudes could have been different if this analyses had a narrower scope -for instance the topic of career development, the topic of communication between institutions, or the report of best practices, etc. In some cases, due to technical reasons some answers are narrowed or skipped. The mediation of the English language imposed further alternation of some remarks but there is still a chance that the prospective readers of this volume from each of the countries of interest will be free to react to what is written in this volume.

Just like the river that moves different streams but follows the same direction, this text was directed at introducing prominent women from the Danube region on the basis of their identification with gender and democratic change. Some may look for common fragments of experience, shared by those women on the basis of their gendered remembering. Others may discover different streams and intentions even within one and the same narrative. Sometimes during the interview the respondent can even contradict his/her previous statements as it is a simultaneous speech flow, whose transcription reproduces it as a text and thus excludes all extra linguistic layers that may have influenced the answers. Therefore, the collection should not be regarded as an ultimate and singular source of information about the visibility of gender mainstreaming policies and agents from the Danube region. It serves more as a start for better communication between the members of the Women's Danube Network. It is just the beginning of a beautiful partnership.

Notes:

- 1 http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/cooperation/danube/index_en.htm Bibliography
- 2 The project "Gender Relations in Education: Policy and Practice in the Danube Region. Experiences, Analyses, and Impulses" is supported by the Landesstiftung Baden-Württemberg (Stuttgart) and the European Danube-Academy, Ulm (www.donauakademie.eu, Germany). The academic leadership is appointed to Dagmar Engels from the Volkshochschule in Ulm, Germany and the coordinator is Nadezhda Aleksandrova from Sofia University, Bulgaria. The other experts in the project are Gerrit Kaschuba (Germany), Ulla Waterkemper (Germany), Andreea Pető (Hungary), Dóra Dezső (Hungary), Mihaela Frunza (Romania), Jelena

Stefanovic (Serbia) and Olena Suslova (Ukraine). Published: Nadezhda Aleksandrova: Gender Relation in Education. Policy and Practice in the Danube Region. Experiences, Analyses and Impulses. Ulm 2012.

- 3 A very valuable and telling source of information about the competences of boys and girls in reading, mathematics and natural sciences is PISA – a research initiated by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. See: OECD (2010), PISA 2009 Results: Overcoming Social Background – Equity in Learning Opportunities and Outcomes (Volume II) <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264091504-en>

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