

Conference impressions and thoughts

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The conference setting was marvelous with a grand view over Oslo and the weather was wonderful - warm and sunny. I am very pleased that NorFA decided to take this initiative of "reviewing the Nordic experiences on actions for gender equality in Academia."

The organizing committee had invited Vigdís Finnbogadóttir to give the opening speech and Vigdís Finnbogadóttir also stayed for the whole conference and participated actively in discussions which was indeed very inspiring. It was interesting to hear about the thoughts and experiences that Vigdís Finnbogadóttir had gathered over the years and how she had dealt with the power invested in her when she was the President of Iceland. I also very much enjoyed hearing about her present job as chair of COMEST¹ and how she felt that being a women chair did make a difference for the choice of problems that the committee decided to deal with. Vigdís Finnbogadóttir stressed one very important issue, which is relevant to remember for other similar conferences; the lack of male participants. As she put it "without the men nothing will change". I do not know if the lack of men was a result of invitations primarily being sent out to women or if it was more a result of women being the only ones that found the title "Women in Academia" interesting. Which ever it is I think that Vigdís Finnbogadóttir has an important point - we have to somehow make the men interested enough that they find it worth their time, but how?

Carol Lee Bacchi's talk on, how language can play an important role in how we define problems related to gender, was an eye opener for me. I had not given much thought to this before and I therefore found it fascinating. Although it was somehow depressing to realize that the way "mainstreaming" is used, emphasize is on how women can be accommodated/incorporated into the existing institutional system instead on how to make the necessary changes in the system. But this was probably the most useful new information I got at this conference, since now when I am aware of it I am able to try to oppose it.

I chosen to participate in workshop I "Building good indicators for equality in academia, the Nordic countries in a comparative perspective". The coordinator Barbara Hartung opened the workshop with giving some insight to how she viewed the situation for women in academia in Germany. After that Brigitte Degen presented the very interesting ETAN report² that had just been released. Brigitte Degen informed about how difficult it was to get proper statistical information relevant in relation to gender balance in science and technology in Europe. Since I happen to know how difficult such information can be to get hold of in Denmark it did not surprise me that the problems was at least as great

¹ World Commission of the Ethics of Scientific Knowledge and Technology

²Science Policies in the European Union - Promoting excellence through mainstreaming gender equality. The report can be downloaded from <http://www.cordis.lu/improving/women/documents.html>

within the common EU beauacrecy. What impressed me was the persistency that Brigitte Degen displayed and it made me quite positive that although things moves very slow (much too slow) then they will move thanks to people like her that keep pushing "the system" to deliver the first important tool - the statistics showing what the situation is actually like within the EU, so we can discuss real facts and not just the various impressions we all might have about what we thing it is like. Karin Kjær Madsen gave some depression information on how the situation related to women in academia in Denmark had not really improved over the years. There was not much discussion in the workshop, partly because there was not much time after the three presentations but also partly because it was a bit unclear what we should/could discuss. We all agreed on that statistics is vital to get and that it is terrible that gender statistics in academia does not have high priority within Eurostat. The only thing to say about the Danish examples was "ohh, glad that I do not live there"! Although I found all the information that I had received at the workshop very interesting and also relevant, the workshop did not at all fulfill my expectations. I had expected (based on the title) that we would be told a bit about the different strategies in the Nordic countries on how they deal with the lack of women in academia. Based on this information I had expected a good discussion on which strategies we would say had worked and which did not, i.e. were the Tham professorships in Sweden a good move? A lot of initiatives seem to have been taken in Finland over the last years and I would really have loved to hear more about what they have done and how they evaluate the significant of it. Since Norway and Island are not EU member states no numbers on the situation in these two countries was presented.

The day ended with a wonderful conference dinner, beside excellent food and wine the organizing committee had gotten hold of the "Strinda Strings Quartet" to deliver the musical entertainment. The quartet consist of four young men that was brave enough to admit that they found it a bit frightening to perform in front of ~120? mature women, but never-the-less they put on a fantastic show. At the conference dinner I noticed one thing - the ~7 men that also attended the conference had a tendency to clump together, so instead of spreading out over 7 tables they were concentrated at 3 tables. I recognize this pattern from myself at conferences, but I am not sure if the men realized their pattern of behavior?

The second day was opened by Gro Hohnsrud Langslet who told about solution oriented approaches, it was an interesting talk but I find the things she stressed more relevant for my relationships with my husband, children and parents, than for my work situation. Liselotte Lyngsø presented scenarios for the future academia according to her title. The talk was one of the standard talks from the Institute for Future Studies and it was not angled towards Women in Academia at all. The talk therefore seemed quite out of place. Liselotte Lyngsø emphasized that the future will move us towards the "story-teller society" and as icon of this she used Steve Speilberg where had she considered the conference participants then Astrid Lindgren had seemed a better choice.

Merete Reuss summed up the conference and emphasized that "the work carried out in the EU is of great importance but maybe the Nordic countries could contribute to qualifying the analysis of statistics and indicators". This I think would be very relevant to

take up at the next conference - if NorFA could be convinced to make one more conference related to the topic of Women in Academia? What I missed at this conference could then be discussed there. I would love to hear talks by Nordic gender researchers, politicians, and administrators where they presented the situation in the individual Nordic countries. What is the view on Women in Academia in the different countries, is it considered a problem that women are underrepresented? This might seem like a strange question but in my experience then many academics considered the lack of women more a problem for women than for academia - a discussion about this would be quite valuable. The countries that consider the low representation of Women in Academia a problem what have they done about it? Did it work? Have they managed to identify possible opsticals? What will they do next?