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GENDER IN GEOGRAPHY: AN ESSENTIAL BASIS OF ANALYSIS

Abstract: Cultural values and norms about women, men, gender relations and about femininity and masculinity not only are fundamental in the construction processes of societies; they also shape the constitution and the use of spaces and places from individual to global level. The home, the company, neighbourhoods, public spaces, the labour market, the city, the nation state or the global market: all of these spaces are closely and inextricably characterized by specific activities of women and men, by specific gendered power relations and by specific symbolic meanings of gender. Geographic research should therefore acknowledge gender as an essential basis of analysis.

In my statement I will present some recent results of geographic research on gender in Switzerland focusing on the spaces "home", "labour market" and "welfare state". I am convinced that geographic science with its traditional focus on specific socio-spatial contexts at different levels is capable to make substantial contributions to the rapidly developing and inherently interdisciplinary field of gender studies.

The Meanings of Gender

In this 15-minute statement I will argue that gender is a basic analytical category and should be given more importance in future geography than it has been done in the past. Gender has many different meanings (Harding, 1986): Gender is a *pivot of social order*. A specific division of work between women and men characterizes every society – despite many recent changes. Gender is also an essential *element of individual identity*. Boys and girls are socialized differently and as a consequence develop in most cases a male or female identity. Gender is furthermore an important *dimension in the symbolic system*. Cultural values and norms about femininity and masculinity – how male and female persons are expected to behave – shape personal identity and social institutions.

These structural, individual and symbolic meanings of gender also shape the constitution and the use of spaces and places from local to global level (McDowell, 1999). The home, the company, quarters and neighbourhoods, public spaces, the labour market, the city, the nation state or the global market: all of these spaces are characterized by specific activities of women and men, by specific gendered power relations and by specific symbolic meanings of gender.

Geographic research and teaching should therefore acknowledge gender as one of the essential bases of analysis and systematically include gender in teaching and research. I

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am presenting now two examples of including gender from my own practice as a university teacher and researcher in geography. The first example comes from a teaching lecture.

What is Work?

“What is work? Methods to measure and evaluate unpaid work.” This is the topic of the lecture. In a first step I use to present different definitions and concepts of work. It gets clear that the normal definition of work is very narrow and one-sided. Talking about work most people - including researchers, politicians and journalists - think of paid work in the formal economy. However, looking closer at daily realities, it is also clear that a lot of work is done informally – be it paid, partly paid or not paid (Drew, 2000).

In a second step I explain different methods to measure unpaid work. In the following point I discuss different methods of monetary valuations of unpaid work including some calculations for Switzerland. And in the last step we are discussing the meanings of the gendered division of work. I am presenting now a very short summary of this lecture.

Unpaid and Paid Activities in Switzerland

Table 1: Unpaid Activities in Switzerland in Switzerland 1997

Activity	Million hours spent
Cooking	1'527
Cleaning, keeping home tidy	1'102
Caring for animals, plants, garden	879
Shopping	708
Setting table, cleaning dishes	651
Etc. etc.	
Total amount of unpaid work	7'738

Source: (Madörin, 2001)

According to a survey of 1997 most time is spent in Switzerland for unpaid cooking in the private households (see table 1). Cleaning the home and keeping it tidy is the second most important single unpaid activity. Caring for animals, plants, gardening, shopping, setting the table and cleaning dishes also consume a great share of unpaid work. The complete list of unpaid activities contains 13 items (Buehler, 2003). In total 7'738 millions of hours have been spent in Switzerland 1997 for unpaid work. If we compare this amount with the total amount of paid work in the same year, which resulted in 6'549 millions of hours ((Madörin, 2001), we notice that in Switzerland much more work is done unpaid than paid.

By far the largest share of unpaid work is carried out within the private households. Neighbourhood help - for instance helping an old neighbour - and volunteer work - for instance managing a sport club or engaging in local politics - are also important unpaid or maybe partly paid activities. However neighbourhood help and volunteer work

consume much less time than the activities done within the households (Buehler, 2003; Madörin, 2001).

Gender Divisions of Work

Paid and unpaid work is distributed very unevenly between men and women. On the one hand, men are spending almost twice as many hours in paid work. On the other hand women carry out more than the doubled amount of unpaid work. According to my knowledge all Western societies show more or less similar gender divisions of paid and unpaid work. From a geographic point of view, however, it would be extremely interesting to analyze the differences between nations, cultural regions or other territorial units. It would be very interesting for instance to compare the situation in Serbia – a formerly socialist welfare state – with the situation in Switzerland – a state with a long liberal history.

Monetary Valuation of Unpaid Work

There are different and contested methods to calculate a monetary valuation of unpaid activities. Every method has its advantages and disadvantages. Using the so-called “market costs method” with a “specialist approach” the monetary valuation of unpaid work in Switzerland amounts to 215 billions of Swiss francs in the year 1997 (Schmid et al., 1999). This amounts – very roughly – to about 60% of the official gross domestic product GDP. It is therefore a serious deformation of economic reality that normally such an important contribution to the wealth of a national economy is not considered in official statistics.

The reason for this deformation is the one-sided, narrow definition of work as only paid work on the formal market. And this one-sided definition is very strongly related to male experiences of life, which have been characterized for centuries much more by paid work than by unpaid work. Only since women entered the public sphere of science and politics in greater numbers this deformation of reality has been criticised. Many states have now started to systematically collect data on unpaid work and publish so-called “satellite accounts”. These accounts include the contribution of unpaid work in the GDP (Office fédéral de la statistique (OFS), 2004).

Swiss Atlas on Women and Equity

My second example of including gender in geography is drawn from the “Swiss Atlas on Women and Equity”. I published this atlas in the year 2001 (Buehler, 2001). In the year 2005 the Swiss federal office of statistics published an update of this atlas. It is now available online in the Internet in a German and French version.¹

This atlas contains more than 100 commented maps and graphics. These figures visualize different aspects of the structural and the symbolic meanings of gender. I will

¹ www.bfs.admin.ch/bfs/portal/de/index/regionen/thematische_karten/gleichstellungsatlas.html

discuss here just one map from the first printed version of the atlas. This map visualizes a symbolic aspect of gender. It expresses values and norms about motherhood and the function of the welfare state to support young mothers financially.

It is widely known that Switzerland has a long-standing direct democratic tradition. Swiss people can vote several times per year on different political issues. This map shows the results of a federal vote. On June 6, 1999 Swiss citizens could decide, if they wanted to introduce a federal maternity insurance. This insurance would have guaranteed all mothers 80% of their salary during 14 weeks after they have given birth to a child. Mothers not employed officially – like many spouses of farmers or craftsmen or traditional bourgeois housewives – were to receive a certain amount of money for each child (Buehler, 2004).

I do not have time to go into more details of this maternity insurance issue in Switzerland here. I just want to highlight that the voters in the Italian- and French-speaking territories of Switzerland clearly were in favour of a maternity insurance, while in the German-speaking territories of Switzerland they were definitely against it. These voting results represent people's values and norms about motherhood and about the function of the welfare state to support young mothers financially. The map illustrates therefore that in the German-speaking territories a large part of the citizens believe that young mothers should be supported by the fathers of the children - and not by the welfare state. It also expresses the norm that mothers should stay at home and not go out to work when the children are small. However, the map also illustrates that in the French- and Italian-speaking territories of Switzerland a vast majority of the citizens support quite different values and norms. For instance that the welfare state should support young mothers and that young mothers should not be financially dependent on their husbands.

I think that it is very important to be aware of such differences in the symbolic gender system. And I also think that geography with its long tradition in analyzing different cultural and structural contexts on local, regional, national or international level can make important contributions to this important field of research.

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