

Change in research and in higher education institutions: forms of resistance in a research-action project

Sara Diogo¹, Carina Jordão², Teresa Carvalho², Hana Himi³, Maya Ashkenazi³, Veronika Mešková⁴, Anita Thaler⁵, Jennifer Dahmen-Adkins⁶

1 – Department of Social, Political and Territorial Sciences & CIPES & GOVOP, University of Aveiro
2 – Department of Social, Political and Territorial Sciences & CIPES, University of Aveiro
3 – Beit Berl Academic College, Israel
4 – Žilinská univerzita v Žiline, Výskumné centrum, Slovakia
5 – Interdisziplinäres Forschungszentrum für Technik, Arbeit und Kultur, Austria
6 – RWTH Aachen University, Institut für Soziologie, Germany

FIGURE 1
Mapping CHANGeR's resistance experiences based on the analysis provided by FESTA .

When compared with other regions in the globe, Europe, notably Northern Europe, has been classified as the 'promised land' of gender equality, especially in the education sector. For Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), an important step towards the promotion of a gender equality culture lies in the creation of the European Research Area (ERA), as the EU stipulated targets to increase women participation in industrial research and technology and in leading positions. Specific funding was thus assigned to promote gender equality in HEIs and several projects have been approved to design and implement Gender Equality Plans (GEPs). However, despite evidence of positive results of GEPs implementation, there are also difficulties and risks, considering the barriers and resistance when trying to implement practices that aim for more gender equal and more inclusive working environments. Resistance, however, and opposition to gender equality policies have

been a relatively new problem in Europe, and the reasons explaining it are yet not fully studied or understood. While some resistance can be of a more institutional nature, e.g. available resources and/or the (in)existence of a gendered agenda, other reasons to resistance have a more individual basis (sensitivities; status quo; personal traits). This study exposes the experience of the implementation of a GEP in the implementing institutions of the CHANGE project – Challenging Gender (In)Equality in Science and Research consortium, reflecting specifically on the structural and cultural challenges faced by the implementing partners so far, looking to the similarities and differences among different institutional contexts (Table 1). This reflection is based on the FESTA project – Female Empowerment in Science and Technology Academia – a similar FP7 funded project initiative. Despite national and organizational differences, four different types of resistances which are independent from the institutional and/or national contexts were identified: fear of feminism; assumption of HEIs as gender neutral and the presence of dominant discourses on excellence and merit; devaluing knowledge on gender equality; and lack of institutional or personal support.

Start up/Initiation [Relevant in Organisations]	Data Collection [Relevant in Organisations]	Execution/ Implementation [Relevant in Organisations]	Additional experiences from CHANGeR [Relevant in Organisations]
No funding for gender equality work NIB; UAVR; UNIZA	Standing in front of an "All is well" wall BBC; UAVR; UNIZA	Shooting the messenger BBC; NIB; UAVR	Fear of feminism, Image of objector of the traditional values UNIZA
Women are not born for science UAVR	Resistance to reflect one's own role NIB; UNIZA; UAVR	Refusal to engage with a gender equality project NIB; UAVR	Women are especially gifted for admin project work UNIZA; NIB
Introduce gender to high-level management BBC; NIB; UAVR; UNIZA	Dedicate matter of sharing information - e.g. salaries BBC; NIB	Science is an elite sport UAVR	Confusing of the process/system Criticism with the criticism of the people UNIZA; NIB
Resistance to EU projects (none)	No need to hide hostility UNIZA	Women uncomfortable with gender UAVR; UNIZA	Fear to become the CHANGeR (team member, ambassador for gender equality) NIB
Fear of feminism ALL	Not all women cooperate NIB; UAVR	When there's no benefit NIB; UNIZA	Convince people that any type of actions are needed NIB
	Resistance from academic council NIB; UNIZA	Lack of interest/Resistance to learn about gender NIB; UAVR	Low interest in workshops from the highest management level NIB
	Negativism and low interest about gender equality ALL	Lack of commitment to gender equality work NIB; UAVR	Passive resistance, minimal cooperation, making initiative "fade away" BBC; NIB
	Resistance to a CHANGeR NIB; UAVR	Resistance from women NIB; UAVR	Fear of being exposed BBC; NIB
	Objections from a female researcher NIB; UAVR	Convince people that on-the-job actions are needed IFAM; NIB; UAVR	
		Silence speaks NIB	
		Resistance from new head of department NIB	
		Low interest in workshops BBC; NIB; IFAM; UAVR	
		Mismatch of gender policy and gender reality NIB	

Source: authors.