Women in a Research Institute in the Period of Institutional Crisis of Science in Post-Soviet Russia

Institutional crisis of science in Russia penetrates not only University system but Academy of Sciences as well. Women-researchers also are living through this crisis, which reveals at least in the shortening of the state budget for science and research, decline of the prestige of profession, lack of demand for fundamental studies, politicking social research, etc. There are good reasons for such a crisis. I will give an overlook of them in a nutshell.

Science under socialism was totally state controlled. There were no state-independent foundations that could support research. Trade-unions, enterprises, voluntary associations that could be interested in projects were under party-state domination both ideologically and financially. Since the beginning of 1992 the situation has been changing. The general privatisation programme, started by the prime-minister Yegor Gaidar resulted, in particular, in shortening of the state-budget for science and education. This situation brings forward latent unemployment in research institutions. Latent unemployment can be explained by the general redundancy of researchers in Academy, especially in social sciences. But this does not make the situation easier. Latent unemployment means that people stay at their jobs, but are underpaid. As one of the respondents commented on this situation: "State is imitating that it pays, employees are imitating that they work". Administration does not demand much from the personnel, understanding that in the Academy the situation cannot be improved until it won’t be reconstructed. However, this necessary reconstruction period is postponed. Hardly any administrator can afford to be brutal enough to fire people who, as he knows, will have difficulties in finding jobs. In other cases employees are protected by law. People cannot be dismissed during the last three years before retirement age. Jobs for single mothers with young children as well as for women on maternity leave (for the last group for three years) are secured.

However, if he/she relies exclusively upon the earnings in the state job, a researcher will find him/herself on the lowest income level. Let us give an example. Now (November, 1994) a senior researcher in the Academy of Sciences earns about 100,000 rubbles that equates to DM 50 monthly. This sum is very small, taking into account compatibility of market prices. To survive under this difficult financial conditions researchers are combining several jobs, sometimes in spheres quite different from their work in the Academy. There are examples when sociologists change their jobs for new enterprises, small business, banking, administration jobs in new offices and municipality. There are attempts to establish new private and commercial research centres. But those are mainly "male strategies" for survival. They take risks in the emergent private sector. Those who are competent, self-confident and have good partners that provide them with necessary resources now start to run new business whether in science or in other branches of economy.

Many others, still preserving their positions in the Academy, use new opportunities for earnings, that emerged in the last few years. Among those new resources are individual (or group) research support schemes that are developed by international or few national foundations, such as Soros Foundation, McArthurs Foundation, Russia's Foundation for Fundamental Research, etc. Entrepreneurs, politicians and administration as well as foreign partners are among new clients for empirical research in mass opinion polls, voting behaviour, marketing, etc. On the average, every sociologist in the Academy (case St. Petersburg) participates in two or three research projects, depending upon the money provided by them. If you are happy to work in a joint project with foreign colleagues, you can afford the luxury to work in one project that will bring you enough income. But this case is very rare.

The question is WHAT IS SPECIAL FOR WOMEN in the depicted above situation of general institutional crisis of Soviet science. To answer this question one has to look at the factors that explain success in "fund raising" and finding interesting and financially good projects among researchers. Those who more often get support from foundations or orders from clients are obviously men. (Here we do not deal with special resources for feminist research or women studies funding, which help only a few especially active and professional women in special fields.) It does not mean that clients discriminate women-researchers on purpose. It is not true. It "just happens". The next question is WHY IT HAPPENS? The answers are simple enough.

FIRST. Women in average seem to be less initiative in individual fund raising and project-search for their individual work. Most of them used to work in teams (socialist collectives) and not individually. In those teams women often were subordinates that had less responsibilities than a boss, who was presenting the results of the work to the higher officials. In the current situation team research groups are temporal - they work on concrete projects. Their organizational structure presumes a large amount of responsibility on the behalf of every member of the team, which differs from the structure in Soviet
collectives. Lack of initiative behaviour is one of the consequences of socialist collectivist working life experiences of women-researchers.

SECOND. Current situation in the economy increases the burden on women who want to combine their domestic labour with a public job. Women withdraw from participating in several projects simultaneously, because of their second shift in the family. They are reluctant to switch into new jobs and start private enterprises, even affiliated to their profession, because they often cannot accept work styles, relevant to crisis situation. New entrepreneurship in Russia in any branch of economy, including science, demands a new type of work attitude, new intensity of work, when very often working hours long literally day and night, and week-ends or holidays do not exist. This life-style is not affordable for women with children or in a family with dependent persons. (By the way, a husband in Russia also can be included into the category of “dependent persons” in some sense, because a wife often provides him with everything in the family.)

Mostly, married women and women with children need special schedules of working hours, that will allow them to combine domestic and public work. Their double burden is multiplied, if they run several other jobs. The situation for them is even worse because in many cases women have small children who have to attend pre-school institutions that are now much more costly than under socialism (70,000 - 150,000 rubbles monthly in the private kindergartens, where children are given good enough treatment and care). It is important to emphasize that in many cases women-researchers are single mothers and in the so-called complete families in Russian-Soviet tradition children and household are main responsibilities of women. Sharing work in the family between spouses is not at all the custom even among intellectuals.

My example is from the statistics of the Institute of Sociology, Russian Academy of Sciences, St. Petersburg branch. In the Institute 71 people work (administrative staff is not included). Among them are 37 women, which is more than 50 % of the total. Eighteen women are married (50 %). Fourteen have children of school- and pre-school age (six women have children under 6 years old). This means that at least 14 women have a lot of peculiar problems that prevent them to participate in ambitious programmes that need highly intensive work and are very well paid.

THIRD. Orders and grants are often given to people with "good" curriculum vitae, that is with comparatively high status, sizeable list of publications, advanced contacts with researchers in international sociological community. With few exceptions it is not a typical case for women in research in Russia.

Let me give another example from the Institute of Sociology. In the Institute the total number of the researchers with degrees (candidates and doctors of
What is the situation of female academics at European universities, and which conceptions for the promotion of women exist? This book is the documentation of a symposium held at the Freie Universität Berlin, which brought together women from eight European countries who are active in women’s studies or equal opportunities policies. This view to the European neighbour countries provides interesting insights into barriers for the promotion of women in academia and into existing equal opportunities policies and their success - as well as information, for example on the fact that in Spanish and Turkish universities the percentage of female professors is much higher than the European average, in spite of the non-existence of special measures for the promotion of women. The book therefore provides interesting ideas for an active equal opportunities policy for women at the university.

Wie sieht die Situation von Wissenschaftlerinnen an europäischen Universitäten aus, und welche Frauenförderkonzepte gibt es? Der vorliegende Band ist die Dokumentation eines Symposiums an der Freien Universität Berlin, auf dem Frauenforscherinnen und Frauenfördererinnen aus acht europäischen Ländern zusammenkamen. Der Blick in die europäischen Nachbarländer ermöglicht interessante Erkenntnisse über Aufstiegsbarrieren für Frauen in der Wissenschaft sowie über existierende Fördermodelle und deren Erfolge - und informiert beispielsweise auch darüber, daß der Professorinnenanteil in der Türkei und in Spanien weit über dem europäischen Durchschnitt liegt, obwohl keine besonderen Fördermaßnahmen für Frauen existieren. Das Buch liefert damit interessante Anregungen für eine aktive Frauenförderpolitik an der Hochschule.