

What Do the Early Career Women Academics and Researchers expect from the Implementation of the Academic Mentoring Programme in Bulgaria? (Presentation of the Results of Two Focus Group Study and a Strategy for Start-up of MP in Bulgaria)

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The Empirical Study – Research Team and Major Implication

- The study was carried out by the Bulgarian eument-net team from the Institute for Philosophical Research (N.Sretenova, N. Obreshkov, D. Angelova and H. Ambareva). Mrs. Bogdana Dermendjieva from the Institute of Sociology acted as moderator of the held focus group sessions.
- The main implication of our study was that the **local receptivity** towards the planned knowledge transfer on academic mentoring is neither self-evident nor self-understanding. In order to make informed decision about start-up of academic mentoring program in Bulgaria we need insight in the specific local deficiencies and gaps faced by young women scientists in their career building as well as a feedback on beneficiaries' receptivity of the instrument of mentoring.
- The preliminary findings of the study are uploaded on the eument-net electronic platform: www.eument-net.eu



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The Empirical Study – Applied methodology

We conducted two sessions with two target groups using two sociological methods: focus group interviews complemented with questionnaire survey

- The target group of Bulgarian women PhD students in 'soft' and 'hard' sciences coming from different research institutes and Universities – the focus group interviews session with the follow-up completion of a questionnaire took place on 9th May 2007
- The target group of Bulgarian early career women academics and researchers employed in the Bulgarian GOV R&D sector and in HE sector - the focus group interviews session with the follow-up completion of a questionnaire took place on 30th May 2007



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The objectives of the carried out two focus group sessions with the highly potential junior women scientists in Bulgaria

- To collect information and obtain feedback about the obstacles, deficiencies and gaps related with the advancement of their academic career. We need firstly to identify the existing problem areas and then to assess to what extent the implementation of academic mentoring program in Bulgaria might compensate, minimize and even eliminate some barriers faced by early career women researchers and academics in their career building. The implication was that the instrument of the 'academic mentoring' if introduced in Bulgaria might fill the existing gaps and in general might improve the current-state-of-the-arts of the career prospects of the Bulgarian high potential junior women scientists;
- To estimate what kind of mentoring programs, i.e. face-to-face mentoring, group-mentoring, peer-mentoring, cross-mentoring, etc. seem relevant to the specificity of the Bulgarian case;
- To identify the potential *supporting* and *hindering* context-factors which might either facilitate or embarrass the implementation of academic mentoring program in Bulgaria.



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The Questionnaire survey: several open questions-cases. Some of the issues addressed concern

1. relevant factors for the medium term career development, as estimated by the participants
2. gender issues related to
 - a) the work-life-balance
 - b) dual career issues, related to international mobility, and
 - c) women's position in male-dominated environments
3. the image of "successful woman" in the participants field and the availability of role models
4. participation and inclusion in networks for women in academy and research



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What are the deficiencies and difficulties that the young (women) scientists come across in Bulgaria in their career development?

- **Mobility Issue**
- **Deficiency of skill for team work and of practical skill**
- **Lack of dynamics and innovation and of opportunities for applied research**
- **Feeling of age not of gender conditioned discrimination (are there clear rules and criteria for successful career?)**
- **Institutional obstacles**
- **Discontent with the public image of science in Bulgaria**
- **Specific deficiencies in humanities and social sciences: lack of clear criteria of assessment of the scientific production and often – "generation conflict"**



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Mobility Issue

- The young (women) scientists in Bulgaria, as well as their colleagues in the west countries, take into account the significance of scientific mobility and particularly of the postdoctoral specializations for their career development.
- It is quite disturbing that all respondents view the post-doc not only as a necessary stage of their career development, but mainly as the only opportunity to provide satisfying future for them and their families. Some of the representatives of exact sciences do not plan coming back in Bulgaria due to the lack of money, modern equipment and stimulating working environment, necessary if one wants to make good science.



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Deficiency of skill for team work and of practical skill

- due to the fact that the scientific community in a given field is quite small, i.e. there is no "critical mass" of researchers or;
- the scientific community is "closed", i.e. it does not welcome newcomers, or;
- due to the individualistic attitude as it is in social sciences and humanities

The respondents coming from humanities as well as their colleagues from the natural sciences point out the absence of team work – one of the main flaws in the Bulgarian science. This leads not only to deficiency of effective scientific communication, but is also a factor causing obvious emotional discomfort. Here is the key to one of the main hindrances for Bulgarian science – it cannot be a collective product in a lot of areas, which is in great contradiction to the tendencies in the world.



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Lack of dynamics and innovation and of opportunities for applied research

- Most of the participants have already had visits in scientific institutions abroad (laboratories, universities) and the comparison with the work at their home institutions and the lack of perspectives for applying their research in our, yet, underdeveloped industrial sector are demotivating factors for further pursuit of scientific career.
- The perspective to combine the scientific work in academy and in industry is to date realized, but unachieved dream of the young women scientists in Bulgaria.



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Feeling of age not of gender conditioned discrimination (are there clear rules and criteria for successful career?)

- The aging of the scientific community in Bulgaria and the slowly working habilitation system has left the PhD students with the wrong impression that the Law for the Scientific Degrees requires age limit – 45 years.



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Institutional obstacles

The respondents share the obstacles they face in their career development, which are caused mainly by the governing bodies of these institutions:

- Refusal to announce calls for application for researchers with constant affiliation – in the same time the duration of the scientific career is declared as very important and losing one's time is taken as something negative, not to mention that BAS experiences lack of young researchers. One respondent says that she has two MAs and a PhD and still works in the administration.
- The governing body of the particular institutes delays the call for application.
- There is an opinion that deliberate impediments are created in order to prevent the young researchers to go abroad since it is more useful for the institution to keep them in the institutes.
- Part of the respondents share that they have some extra job and it carries them away from the scientific work, even if this extra job is teaching.



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Specific deficiencies in humanities and social sciences: lack of clear criteria of assessment of the scientific production and often – "generation conflict"

In the analysis of the records from the interviews one main demarcation line showed up: it is conditioned by the differences between the disciplinary cultures or, in other words, by the belonging of the respondents to natural sciences or engineering, on one hand, and to social sciences and humanities, on another (the famous problem of the "two cultures" of Ch. P. Snow). It appears that notions like "scientific hierarchy", "individualism", "competition", "generation problem" (conflict between the different generation in science) are articulated mostly by representatives of "the un-scientific culture" (according to Snow). The difference in these disciplinary cultures however determines the building of two different contexts and ways of speaking on problems, related to science and scientific career.



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Some conclusions of the conducted empirical study

- The main problems of the career development of young (women) researchers appears to be the lack of stimulus for further progress.
- The common characteristic is that the situation is perceived as highly problematic and the most effective solution is "leaving" – going abroad, change of thematics, shift to another (closely related) scientific field, change of the institutional affiliation. Staying "still" and 'on spot' is conceived as a risk.
- 'The Two Culture' of Ch. P. Snow in Action – Our empirical study reveals the importance of the disciplinary field – we identify a clear divide between the academic career planning, expectation, trajectory, deficiencies and gaps between the respondents from the social sciences and humanities and those from the natural sciences and engineering. One-to-one mentoring relationships and to some extent peer-mentoring seem to be relevant for the early career researchers in social sciences and humanities, while the group mentoring fits to the representatives of the natural sciences and engineering.



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What do early career women academics and researchers expect from the implementation of academic mentoring programmes in Bulgaria? What kind of support do they imagine to receive from their mentor?

- To help me to get involved in international projects; to consult me about some practical requirements related with project's preparation; to facilitate my access to international contacts
- Professional lobbying - to convince his/her professional contacts abroad in the values of my scientific work; to serve as PR for my scientific production abroad
- To advise me which is the best place for my planned post doc abroad and for my career planning (e.g. 2 months stay at this institution, 6 months - at the other, because...); to negotiate the conditions of my forthcoming specialization/post doc abroad
- To provide information about recent novelties and innovations in my field

Main concern and skepticism expressed: perception of trust and confidence. The mentor is supposed to be a friend as well and to really care about me. The skepticism comes from the fact that friendship could not be administrated – one establishes it by intuition.



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The start-up of a mentoring programme is strongly dependent on the synergy between specific supportive conditions present on the following structural levels

- **The national level** - legislation, policy and politics, organization and administrative structures and resources related with gender equality issue (in higher education and research)
- The level of research and academic institutions
- The level of agents (actors)
- The level of potential beneficiaries: mentees and mentors



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Formal negotiations with the EC for EU membership: Chapter 13 of the Union *acquis* 'Social policy and employment' (equal treatment for men and women)

- 2003: *Law on Protection against Discrimination* (adopted on 30 September 2003)
- 2004: At the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy was established a sector/unit for "Equal Opportunities for Women and Men" with a view to coordinating and implementing the state policy in this area
- 2005: At the Bulgarian Council of Ministers was established 'A National Council for Equal Opportunities'

In Bulgaria a **general policy of non-discrimination by sex in all fields of social activities is existing, but a particular policy for 'gender equality (in higher education and research)' is still lacking**



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A Comparison with partners' countries: Switzerland, Germany and Austria

- At the level of federal and/or national governments of Switzerland, Germany and Austria a national policy for gender equality in higher education has been adopted and further developed in the respective ministries of education and science. The operationalization of this policy results in establishment of departments/units in charge of implementation of the state policy for gender equality in higher education through opening of specific target programmes and funding-lines for support of activities in this area.
- In particular in Germany, Austria and Switzerland specific laws have been enacted which provided an instrument for implementation of gender equality in higher education and enabled the creation of federal programmes of equal opportunities in accordance with the adopted national gender equality policy in higher education.
- Unlike partners' countries in Bulgaria the ministry of education and science has not developed a similar national policy for gender equality in higher education because it has to address other priorities of its agenda setting. The consequences are that the ministry lacks organizational and administrative structure engaged with the coordination of activities in the field of gender equality in higher education as well as a specific budget for support of such activities.



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A Comparison with partners' countries: Switzerland, Germany and Austria

- **Switzerland:** the adopted national policy for 'gender equality in higher education' on federal and/or national level has been implemented in establishing a particular organizational and administrative structure – 'Offices for gender equality' across Swiss French universities and Swiss German universities;
- **Germany:** a particular regional structure – 'Baden-Wuerttemberg's state conference of equal opportunities officers (LaKoG);
- **Austria:** the 'Project Centre for the Advancement of Women' which was later re-named into 'Centre for Gender Equality' was institutionally set at the Rectorate of the Vienna University.

Similar structures which might facilitate the potential start-up of an academic mentoring programme lack in Bulgaria.



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**A Comparison with partners' countries:
Switzerland, Germany and Austria (She Figures 2006;
data for 2004)**

Country	Grade A (Full Professors)	Grade B (Associate Professors)
Bulgaria	18.0	34.9
Switzerland	16.5	23.3
Germany	9.2	16.1
Austria	9.5	16.2
EU – 25 average	15.3	32.2

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Tentative conclusions drawn by comparison

- A comparison between the Bulgarian and partners' cases at the three constituent levels (national, the level of academic and research institutions and the level of supporting agents) suggests that the partners' models of starting-up mentoring programmes currently cannot be transferred to Bulgaria.
- While partners make efforts to re-define the current policy and politics of 'gender equality in higher education' as practised in their universities to a policy and politics of gender equality and gender balance of academic staff at the higher hierarchical levels of academic organizations and at leadership and decision-making positions Bulgaria needs to advocate for the transfer of current policy and politics of 'non-discrimination by sex' into a policy and politics of 'gender equality in academia and research'.



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**A four-step strategy for implementation of
academic mentoring programmes in Bulgaria**

Given the lack of supportive conditions at each of these three levels how then an academic mentoring scheme could start-up in Bulgaria at all? According to our study, the outlined specific hindering factors of the Bulgarian case might be overcome through a **step-by-step approach**.

- First step: **Networking**
- Second step: **Fund raising**
- Third step: **Short-term perspective (1-2 years)**
- Forth step: **Medium-term perspective (3-5 years)**



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Thank you for your attention!



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