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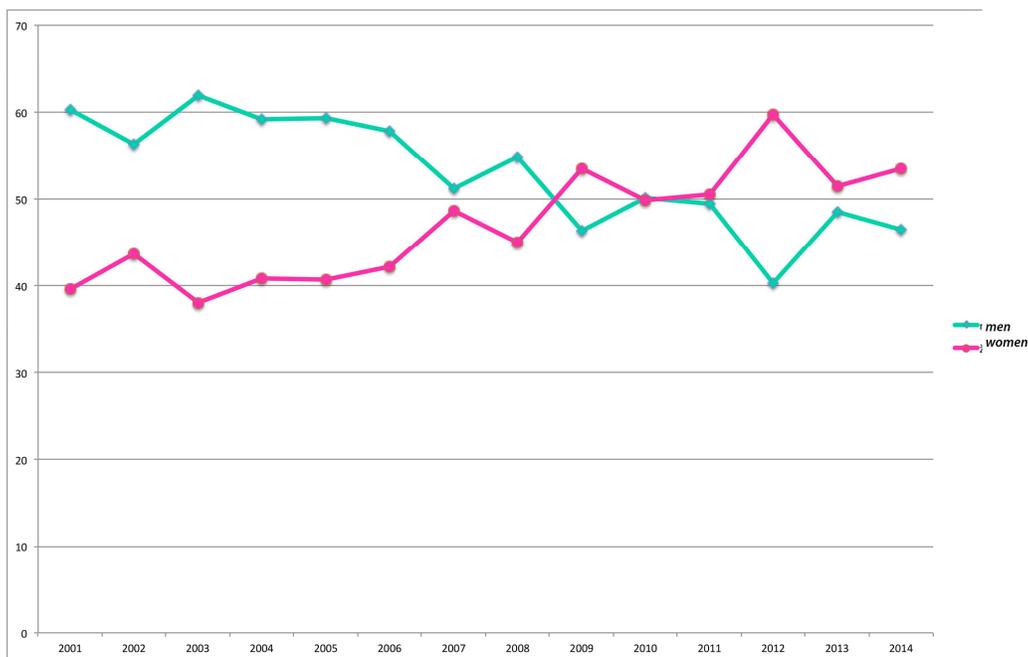
Successful woman architect, urban planner? Vienna_Prague comparative baseline study

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As stated by architecture theoretician Helena Doudova in her recent article: *Czech women architects, where do you go?*(2015), although feminist tradition in Czech Republic is not a really strong one, the confidence of the new generation of young women architects can be recognized. Nevertheless she keeps asking whether this will be reflected on institutional and practical level too?

Although we suspect many women are practicing architecture without official authorization, there are no clear relevant data. We keep tracking numbers of the authorized ones - members of Czech Chamber of Architects. They create 22 % of all authorized members (WPS Prague 2015). Since 2008 women make more than 50 % of graduates on Czech faculties of architecture. We are left with questions: *Where do we lose women in these professions? Why is it so and how can we overcome these obstacles?*

Gender ratio of graduates at public and private Czech universities in programs
35 - Architecture 36 - Construction, Geodesy, Cartography and 4109, 4111 - Garden and Landscape Architecture a
between 2001-2014 at faculties of architecture



Source: MŠMT ČR, processed: Ing. Milota Sidorová, PhD. 2015

Obstacles in professional life of woman architect, urban planner

There is no complex and comprehensive research on this topic held in Czech Republic and Slovakia. In this case we rely upon foreign sources that outline summary of obstacles in professional life of women architects and urban planners.

Graft-Johnson, Manley, Greed in their study *Why do women leave architecture* (2003) state there is no clear, definitive answer. The reasons why do women leave tend to be a combination of a number of factors and or a 'final straw' moment. Some of the key issues are as follows:

- **Low pay**
- **Unequal pay**
- **Long working hours**
- **Inflexible/unfamily friendly working hours**
- **Sidelining**
- **Limited areas of work**
- **Glass ceiling**
- **Stressful working conditions**
- **Protective paternalism preventing development of experience**
- **Macho culture**
- **Sexism**
- **Redundancy and or dismissal**
- **High litigation risk and high insurance costs**
- **Lack of returner training**
- **More job satisfaction elsewhere** □

On the university level it was:

- **lack of women professors, role models**
- **discouraging environment and behavior of male academy staff towards women students**

Usual comments were that *the architecture was tough business not suitable for women, or that it is very difficult for women to survive in this business*. There was little evidence that women left because they were incompetent designers or that they no longer wanted to be architects. One major concern is the extent to which some architectural practices are operating outside current legislation in relation to employment practice.

Survival strategy? Recipe for successful career? Baseline comparative study Vienna_Prague

Vienna is one of the leading cities in quality of life. It is the leader in adopting gender mainstreaming as a tool for urban planning. But the discussion goes further - while architecture and urban planning are traditionally male dominated professions where 'men design and decide for men and women', we find exceptional women leading architects,

urban planners and experts in urban related professions being actively involved in these processes in Vienna. It is not news that Prague's leading competitor in urban planning is Vienna. These along with the relative proximity made Vienna relevant research city to work in.

Through the program genderSTE I spent summer 2015 in Vienna on a short-term scientific mission. The aim of my research was pilot mapping of obstacles and their possible solutions in professional lives of women architects. During this phase I conducted 7 in-depth qualitative interviews with relatively well known, established women architects in different stages of their lives also working on different positions (Director, Partner, Co-founder, Freelancer, Academic Staff). Viennese interviews are now being completed with their 7 Prague counterparts and conclusions are being made.

Meanwhile I was able to identify preliminary areas and topics that I will share in this paper.

0. Austrian paradox

In regards to obstacles in profession, respondents agreed with the outcomes of British study, meanwhile stated that Austria was even more conservative society with stiff working morals. The representation of women experts makes 16 % of all registered authorized architects (Wikipedia 2015). On the other hand, Austria has had more than 25 years of experience of applying gender mainstreaming especially in architecture and urban planning. How could there be such understanding of gender equality in urban planning practice while the representation of women practitioners remained low? This paradox was outlined by one respondent. While public sector took gender mainstreaming principles into practice in Vienna by positive EU law enforcement in 90's, private sector remained immune when it came to gender equality on working place.

Gender mainstreaming set strong precedent in urban planning of Vienna (Bauer 2015), fostered feminization of policies and applying informal quotas (e.g. it is seen as good practice to invite at least one woman architect into public tender).

1. Individual success vs. quotas

I have experienced different levels of gender sensitivity during interviews. Some respondents claimed that the success was individual choice and everyone (whether man or woman) could achieve successful career if they *worked hard*.

While this remains true, it doesn't represent full spectrum of professional options. Working hard and ignoring other aspects of life was not stated as ideal solution for everyone. Not every architect wanted to be like iconic *Zaha Hadid*. Freelance architect, researcher and professor Sabina Riss-Retschitzegger claims:

„I don't think we should be all like Zaha Hadid. We are fighting for competence. We are different, but it doesn't mean we would be less equal in our profession. However, architecture is part of building economy that remains heavily male dominated.”

Quotas remained controversial topic despite of the fact that all respondents agreed they were necessary. Quotas should open opportunities for professional success, but it shouldn't be the criteria for preference of female work.

Architect, Director of Elsa Prochazka studio, Elsa Prochazka summarizes:

„Nobody likes them, but I know they are needed, otherwise the situation won't change and progress. Understanding of equality should be self-evident, but it can't be achieved without quotas first.

I would like to live in society where it is natural to have men and women in ratio 3:2 or 3:3. I would like to live in society where the criteria is not to be female, but the quality of the work.”

Gabu Heindl, architect, owner of Gabu Heindl Architects perceives quotas as a tool for institutional change in all professions (Sidorova 2015).

“Yes, I am for quotas. I do think it is a matter of visibility and as long as it is a self-reproducing system that basically keeps men visible and reproduces their presence (by reciprocally reproducing) the invisibility of women's work, it is a perpetual condition that can be changed only by quotas and active political support. Most certainly there is a woman with equal qualification and men in other professions. So it goes the other way around. I also don't see any reason why men shouldn't work in kindergartens or as stewards etc.”

2. Independence

One of essential conditions for remaining in profession was professional independence. Women in positions of owners, founders, co-founders, partners at their studios, departments or freelancers could maintain independence in regards to finances, working time and studio, team structure. Eva Kail, the former head of Women coordination office, urban planning department in the City of Vienna formulated this possibly in the most articulated way (Sidorova 2016).

„I have achieved position so I was paid well. My husband was also working so we have never had financial problems. But that is rather lucky, you reach higher position with higher wages so you have a luxury to work part time and still live well. If you are on a low level, it is much harder, which is the case of many younger and freelancers.”

3. Flexibility

„I worked 30 hours a week, well not really, I worked bit more. In my office it was possible. I was the head of the department, so I could really make flexible arrangements. But nobody thought I was working part time. I created such presence and visibility that I

was fully accepted. Sometimes I was working overnight, but the next day I left for the event in kinder garden.

I remember I was at one jungle-party with kids and my secretary just brought me papers from the work. I signed it and she came back to the work.’’

Eva Kail, urban planner, the City of Vienna

Flexibility of working time proved to be essential tool in harmonizing of work/family life or different professions eg. academic, cultural, research, business.

Flexibility can be achieved in one’s own firm (*you set the rules*) or smaller structure (*you are significantly dependent on each other and seek consensus*) or on high position (*you set the rules*).

Regina Loukotova, Co-founder and Dean of private architectural university ARCHIP states the flexible time would be beneficial not only for women, but also men.

„It is normal to work part time, it is normal to come to work in the afternoon or work shifts. It is a custom abroad and it is working. My generation works full time, but many women in their 40-50’s would like to change their profession and work on two different projects or in two different fields. Part time jobs are painful for women of younger generation, especially with kids. If they don’t set up their own business, they don’t get the offer to work part time from they employers. Employers should be educated about benefits of part and flexi time jobs above all.

It doesn’t matter whether woman or man, everyone would like to work on this model. One relative of mine says: Get your work split, Sunday comes to you more often.’’

4. Collective support

Many respondents mentioned that work in female collective brought significant benefits into their professional and personal lives. In case of young architect Julia Nuler, it was a catalyzer that fostered establishment of the studio miss-vdr architektur (Sidorova 2016).

„At the beginning we were thinking: How would it be if there would be a network of women supporting each other? We didn't like to see always women only as partners besides a male architect and just few standing alone.

Our idea was to empower women as architects. All of us had similar ideas about the wish to balance work and private life. The idea to found the studio was also to help each other in balancing that.’’

Eva Kail mentions friendly atmosphere emerging in Women Coordination Office.

„We made personal friendships. We were women working together in a very cooperative, dialogue oriented environment. When I returned back to the mainstream office I have realized how much more competitive and less cooperative environment that has been.

After we have been separated my colleagues still stayed in touch and we advised each other. For example one of us was writing the text, sending it to the others and we immediately sent it back so it was a really effective working.’

5. Leadership

However this question remains highly individual, respondents were speaking a lot about autonomy, horizontal structures, invisible leadership. On behalf of respondents I choose Gabu Heindl who after being asked what kind of leader she considered herself to be responded:

„I think I can be determined, very clear in expectations, formulation of goals and I try to be organized and also communicate tasks, roles through the organization.

The supposed freedom in contemporary working conditions in claims there is no hierarchy actually creates more stress for everybody. There is a simple structure. I run the office, which basically says I have the responsibility which maybe is the reason why I work 7 days per week. My employees can leave and they should - and don't take the work back home."

6. Partner

It is self evident that the characteristic shared by all Viennese and Czech women was their high working pace heavily influencing their personal lives. Some of them were in partnership, marriage, some of them stayed single, some of them had children, while others not.

Women with partners claimed to have very tolerant or equally busy partners who could understand their working pace (doctors, architects, film makers). Some of them were also collaborating with them, but mostly outside of their own business (they were not sharing the firm). Collaboration with the partner while keeping independence and space was mentioned as rather positive factor in relationship.

Respondents with children mentioned that it was essential that the child or family care were to be split between both partners. The role of the father wasn't seen as financial provider only, but active parent taking paternity leave, helping with house works and contributing to family budget. In connection to equal working conditions respondents mentioned that the active fatherhood was essential factor for achieving so.

7. Return to work / Parenthood

All mothers claimed they were much more organized and focused after maternity leave. They claimed it made them more aware of time-consuming activities and tended to be more effective in shorter time in the office (while male colleagues usually did not change).

Elsa Prochazka mentions:

„I was much more disciplined. A lot of time is totally and unnecessary wasted. Meetings. Men like to broad and broad and broad without any necessity. I was more disciplined which prospered my office.”

Conclusions

The baseline comparative study Vienna_Prague has not been completed. Extracts and themes should be seen as preliminary results, nevertheless they clearly show that the debate has been shifting from *female* design towards improving working conditions for women in which all kinds of architecture can emerge. While it can be debated there are design differences in terms of gender, these can be applied both by men and women as in Viennese case when gender mainstreaming became common working practice among men and women.

Gender gaps within professions however are present and can be perceived by women themselves, especially after starting providing care for others. Child, family care tends to be the major obstacle in mainstream led architectural practice. To overcome these obstacles we can mention few principles: possibility of flexible working time, satisfactory financial rewards, equal salaries, financial security or independence, possibility to create their own working structures, supportive atmosphere at work place. Regarding harmonizing work-life balance respondents described partnership as equal share of duties, moral support and joint financial contributions.

The case of individual success can't be perceived as the evidence that the problem doesn't exist or can be overcome by individual effort only (whether for men or women). Debate about equal working opportunities in architecture and urban planning should become structural and political one.

Material for this paper was collected during short-term scientific mission sponsored by genderSTE in august 2015. The study Vienna_Prague was supervised by Gabu Heindl and will be published in 2016 on website WPS Prague – www.wpsprague.com

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