



Epilogue

Abundance or Shortage?

Gender and Scientific Excellence
in the Enwise countries

Nowadays it is not difficult to imagine that talents, capabilities, curiosity and enthusiasm related to scientific production are evenly distributed across gender and border lines, that each generation of young Europeans brings renewed capacity and passion for search and research in science, fresh commitments and desire to solve the puzzles of the mind and troubles of the world.

So, how is it possible, then, that the scientific excellence, the one recognised as such, is so scarce, elitist, heavily concentrated in certain locations, and so often represented by men? Or, to paraphrase Virginia Woolf and her idea of the tragic destiny of Shakespeare's imaginary sister, if a girl was to be born a genius in the Enwise countries today, would she have the opportunity to become some *Shakespeare in science*, or would she, like her genius mother, vanish or evaporate, becoming instead an average, highly-educated woman, tired of the double burden and slowly giving up her hopes and ambitions? Would she have any chance of being better than average, better than the *helper* of a male scientist if she decided to stay in her own country surrounded by her *non gender sensitive* fellow male and female colleagues, exhausting herself with daily survival, underpaid teaching or tiresome administration, being marginalised in team work or internal institutional *division of labour*? Would she be able to follow her own understanding of what is important in terms of research and knowledge and would she be able to build a community of scientists who share similar epistemology and understanding of the world? Would she be provided with adequate material and financial conditions and would she have a decent standard of living? Or rather, would she become a scientific nomad, *wandering like a ghost*¹ from one institution to another, from one country to another? Finally would she have to make a choice, and such a difficult one, to give up personal life and motherhood to become endlessly mobile, in order to become competitive in the international scientific market, which functions with vague and often unfair rules? Would she be caught up in a series of sequential decisions, in a vicious circle, losing in the end the very reason for making such a troublesome journey? Who will support her, who will congratulate her, who will admire her? If she succeeds in the male world of science, will the reward have the same flavour of success as if she had been a man?

"There is a long way to travel through many layers of prejudice in the scientific community until scientists of different backgrounds can participate in the common project of understanding the world... I hope to have reminded you of another significant effort in front of us, that of educating ourselves and our fellow scientists in the art of tolerance and cooperation."

Source: Natalija Micunovic, *Enwise workshop on Balkans, Brussels, 2003*.

"Westerners will always look with big suspicion to somebody who is coming from the East, it is a matter of fact..."

Source: Lithuanian scientist, in *Zvinklene, 2003*.

1. Expression used by Nikolina Sretenova, Bulgarian member of the Enwise Expert Group, to name Eastern brain-drainers in the West.

We do not know about the women who have considered all these dilemmas and decided to give up, who have become scientific *drop-outs*. We do not know how to measure the waste of women's talents or loss of women's excellence in the Enwise countries. But we know that this **waste is huge and detrimental**, not only to potential women scientists, **potentially excellent scientists**, but also for their countries, for Europe and for human kind. On a more practical level, we also know that the ERA goals cannot be fulfilled if potential women scientists, basing themselves on the negative experiences of the present day women scientists in terms of extraordinarily high efforts and extremely low rewards, make the only rational choice – to give up or to *brain-drain*. But, we, women scientists from the Enwise countries, know that change is possible, starting with a deeper understanding of the problem, which this Report is all about.

So in the end, is there shortage or abundance of women's scientific excellence in the Enwise countries? Shortage is societal and cultural construction, a negative consequence of multilayered exclusions. In terms of *excellence*, the semi-peripheral position of the Enwise countries and male-dominated scientific structures are the major constraints for the manifestation of women's *excellence*, preventing it from being visible and recognised. This is why the individual response of women is so often withdrawal and self-marginalisation. Lack of *excellence* measured by the existing numbers does not reflect lack of individual capacities, but societal constraints imposed by both gender and West-East hierarchies.

Women can only move forward if these hierarchies and exclusions connected with them gradually diminish. The same is true for men. The visibility and recognition of abundance, abundance of talents and of excellence, create in fact powerful *win-win* logic, rewarding for both women and men scientists in Europe, highly beneficial for the very project of the European Research Area.

"Coming back home after three years leave, my self-perception was as if I came back home from the military service, as if I had been soldier for 3 years. In England, in each moment of my stay I used to mobilise all of my energy and sense in order to respond to different expectations of my surroundings."

Source: Romanian young female scientist, Symposium on "Science Policy, Mobility and Brain Drain in the EU and candidate countries", Leeds, July 2003.