

Comments for the Yale WFF-Gruber Conference: The Parity programs. The Danish Case from a Democratic Scandinavian Perspective

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Democratization of Denmark: Stating the problem

This paper will compare arguments pro and against *gender quotas in politics*, briefly referring to *gender quotas in corporate boards* and *'fathers' quota*, i.e. parental leave reserved for fathers. Denmark is an interesting case; since it is the only Nordic country which has NOT adopted political parity. It is therefore a paradox that the number of women's Parliamentary representation women counted as close to 40 % of the members of Parliament in the last general election (71 women and 108 men). All kinds of quotas remain controversial in the dominant political discourse, but interestingly the Danish Centre-Left Government in power since September 2011, led by the first female Prime Minister, the Social Democrat Helle Thorning-Schmith, may represent a shift in the discourse. The new Minister for Equality, Manu Sareen, has placed 'fathers' quotas' and gender quotas in corporations on the political agenda. The Action Plan for Equality 2012 includes proposals to expand parental leave reserved for fathers from the present two weeks to up to 3 months; gender mainstreaming of the public sector and equal access for women and men to corporate boards¹. Key questions are who has the power to represent women, to define woman's (and men's) rights and gender equality; what are the arguments pro and against the quotas as well as the implications?

Political Parity - the inclusion of Danish women in political citizenship²

Equality in the Danish case – intersections of gender and class

Is there a Nordic 'passion for equality' and what does this mean in different contexts? In Denmark women gained the vote in 1915 as part of a constitutional reform granting suffrage rights to all men and women over the age of 29. Fiig and Siim (fortc.) suggest that the Danish struggle for women's suffrage was part of the political and constitutional conflict between left and right over democratization, and that women's organizations were not the main advocates of female suffrage. We argue that the intersections of gender and class was at stake, since the debate was whether married women should have the right to vote or be represented by their husbands and whether servants without economic means should be allowed to vote. From a comparative Nordic perspective, Denmark represents a special case in the struggle for women's rights. From a gender perspective, we find no differentiation between married and unmarried women's suffrage. This contrasts to Finland, Sweden and Iceland. From a class perspective universal suffrage referred to all men and all women, including domestic servants.

Political rights and Citizenship: Intersections of political, civil and social rights

Women gained basic civil rights at the end of the 19th century before they won the vote, including full legal capacity in marriage. Scholars have identified a special Nordic model of marriage based on the reform of the marriage legislation in 1925 (Carlsson-Wetterberg & Melby, 2008). This gave married women the right to dispose of their own property and income, full disposal of the common estate, and the custody of children. Arguably the reform was unique from a European perspective,

¹ *Redegørelse, perspektiv- og handlingsplan 2012* [Action Plan]: http://www.lige.dk/files/PDF/PHplan/PH-plan_2012.pdf.

² This short comment is based upon arguments presented in Christina Fiig & Birte Siim: "Democratization of Denmark: The inclusion of women in political citizenship", Blanca Rodríguez-Ruiz & Ruth Rubio-Marín (eds.) *The Struggle for Female Suffrage in Europe*, Leiden-Boston: Brill (in press), pp 61-78.

since it questioned the male-breadwinner model and gave married women the obligation to provide for their family. On this basis gender equality in marriage has been perceived as one of the pillars of the universal Nordic welfare model³.

Explaining the Danish exception

Denmark does not have gender balance in politics, since women's representation has remained 38 % in the last three elections and is now close to 40 percent. From a comparative Nordic perspective, The Danish gender model has been perceived to be more 'bottom up' than Norway and Sweden, because the autonomous women's movement has played a relative stronger role than women in the political parties. In contrast to Norway and Sweden, Denmark has no tradition for gender quotas in political parties; the Social Democrats and the Socialist Folks Party adopted gender quotas in the 80s, but only for limited functions and short periods of time. The two parties both abolished the gender quotas again in 1996 (Bergqvist et.al. 1999; 80). *The main arguments by women and men alike were that the quotas were no longer needed.* The Danish exception has been explained by a combination of a strong bottom-up tradition, which has made the push for gender quotas weaker than in Norway and Sweden, and a strong liberal tradition and more hostile attitudes towards state regulation⁴. Despite women-friendly social policies such as extended public child care, which has contributed to the high level of participation of women, and mothers, on the labor market, gender equality is still absent from major areas of society, especially in leadership positions in private corporations. During the last 10 years with Centre-Right governments the dominant discourse has been that ethnically Danish women have already achieved equality and therefore gender equality initiatives have been primarily directed towards integrating ethnic minority women in politics, the labor market and society. The proposals from the new Centre-Left government to introduce longer periods of parental leave reserved for fathers and for equal access to corporate boards have started to change this discourse.

Further democratization

From a comparative perspective, the Danish – and Nordic - welfare model has combined social and political egalitarianism with welfare nationalism. Democratic struggles for women's suffrage raised questions about the intersections of gender and class. Today democratic struggles concern political and social rights for immigrants and refugees; and the intersections of gender and ethno-national minorities. Arguably one of the challenges to the present Danish gender model comes from immigration, which has increased the diversity of religion, culture and ethnicity in society. This has created new inequalities between ethnically Danish citizens and ethnic minorities. Diversity has become a major political issue, and it has become apparent that women's inclusion in the political elite does not represent all women. One important debate is about the relations between gender quota and quota for ethno-national minority groups and about the intersections of gender with ethnicity/race. Another debate high on the EU agenda concerns gender quotas in politics as well as in corporate boards. Research shows that equal access to enter various domains involve different arguments, i.e. 'justice' arguments in politics vs. references to 'utility' in economic life⁵.

³ See C. Carlson-Wetterberg & K. Melby: "The claims of economic citizenship: The concept of equality in historical context". *Gender Equality and Welfare Politics in Scandinavia* (eds.) K. Melby, A-B. Ravn, & C. Carlsson Wetterberg, Bristol: Policy Press, 2008.

⁴ See C. Bergqvist et. al. *Equal Democracies? Gender and Politics in the Nordic Countries*, Oslo: Scandinavian University Press 1999.

⁵ H. Pristed Nielsen & L. Rolandsen Agustin: "Women, Participation and the European Parliament", Birte Siim & Monika Mokre eds. *Intersectionality and the European Public Sphere*, Palgrave/Macmillan, fortc.

