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Gender equality in the policies of media organizations – selected issues

Abstract: Gender equality, interpreted as the just treatment of men and women in any area of social life, is a priority in the contemporary policies of many countries. The article presents the issues of equal gender opportunities in media companies and in journalism. The issues of journalism as a profession of equal opportunities are discussed, and the limitations faced by female journalists presented. The multi-dimensional and complex position of women in the media is a result of many important historical, social, cultural, political and economic circumstances. The article also presents diversity management in media companies and defines the major indicators of gender equality in editorial team policies. The conclusions pinpoint the need for diversity, counteracting unequal treatment and considering both men's and women's rights in the policy of media organizations with respect to recruitment, remuneration, professional promotion and social benefits.

Key words: women, media, equality policy in media organizations, women in journalism

Introduction

Gender equality, interpreted as fairness of treatment in every area of social life and equal opportunities of men's and women's development, is among the priorities of many countries' social policies. In order to adopt this principle, social and political processes are organized, enhanced, developed and evaluated with respect to gender. Issues of equality are strictly related to women's activity in public life. The prohibition of sex discrimination is among the fundamental rights of the EU system based on the rule of equal treatment. It is interpreted as lack of any discrimination while the EU concept of non-discrimination/equality identifies equality with uniformity (Barcz, 2005, pp. 552–553). Despite the numerous steps taken by the EU, it remains half-way to “the society of gender equality.” On a global scale, the issue of incomplete representa-

tion of women in public life is even more acute. Women are too rarely decision-makers in the world of politics or the media. Increasing the share of women and strengthening their role in the media and in journalism still poses a serious challenge. While for many years the share of women in media politics has been regularly increasing in specific member states, women's position in the mass media as authors and recipients of messages, their career paths and professional promotion as journalists, still raises many doubts. The same holds true for the actual image of women in media coverage. While, in the structures of many contemporary editorial teams, women with high professional skills prevail, only few of them work on managerial positions. Even if women represent a large majority of the recipients of media messages, the female gender is still very frequently shown in stereotypical and conventional roles. High-level tertiary education in women is too rarely reflected in the form of expert media comment.

Journalism is rooted in fight for freedom, decency, progress and rights for everyone. Despite many positive steps and good practice in editorial teams, the list of examples of gender inequality in the media is still very long. The multi-dimensional and complex position of women in media organizations in the context of gender equality is a resultant of many important historical, social, political and economic conditions. The major goal of these considerations focuses therefore on the following research questions: what is the situation of women in the media in Europe and globally; whether and how equality policies are implemented in the media and journalism.

Journalism as a profession of equal opportunities for men and women

A large part of the historical knowledge that we have about women involved in political issues, like, for example, American First Ladies, comes from press coverage provided by female press journalists. As John B. Roberts II stated: "Long after women acquired voting rights and became an important political power, covering the First Ladies was left to female journalists. The first female reporter assigned by a national newspaper to cover developments in the White House [...] rebelled against the responsibility of writing about the First Lady as she did not want to be pigeonholed as a "*chick things*" journalist. That was in the mid-1980s"

(Roberts, 2017, p. 13). Now female journalists all over the world still need to face up to stereotypes which most frequently turn them into media celebrities, anchorwomen and experts in describing fashion or lifestyles. While a majority of editors-in-chief will probably agree that a good anchorman should be credible, professional, have a distinct personality, speak correctly and look good, few of them will admit that the latter characteristic especially (attractive appearance) is particularly in demand or sometimes even indispensable, as in the case of anchorwomen.

Therefore, the stereotypical perception of media organizations and journalism leads to a situation in which women dealing with media topics typically assigned to men need to look extremely attractive or have very strong opinions, so as to avoid constant judgment. Contemporary journalism is prone to change, as is the role of women in the media. The number of professions related to the mass media is growing and are becoming increasingly varied. However, not all of these media professions, e.g. program documentation or research, are “visible” in public life. However, statistics suggest that women find employment most frequently in these areas of journalism. On the other hand, men dominate as editors-in-chief, managers, commentators and columnists, holding a majority of jobs related to management and information policy. Female journalists are typically treated like providers of press materials for men, who are the decision-makers when it comes to the form of the message (Piskozub, 2014). A woman is more likely to be a reporter for a local newspaper or the person interviewing another woman on issues related to education or the health system, than to work as an investigative journalist in mainstream media or have a meaningful job on a media management board. However, there are more and more examples that undermine the stereotypical image of media organization structures, where the key and most decision-making posts are occupied by men. Female journalists dealing with sports, education, technology or national defense are no longer exceptions. Women are present in areas of high risk to the journalist. Female war reporters go to places from which others flee (*Między spokojem a wojną*, 2017). As Jacek Sobczak noted: “We live in ugly times, when this role is so often assumed by women for whom the noise of battle is unbecoming and who should not breathe in the sweat of a coward or the euphoria of a hero” (Sobczak, 2007, p. 250). During war, female journalists face the threat of death or violence as much as soldiers themselves. They treat journalism as a mission and believe that their coverage of war developments and conflicts raises awareness in society. Some of the cor-

respondents pay the highest price, as was the case of Marie Colvin, a BBC journalist who died in 2012 during the siege of Homs in Syria (Przybysz-Smęda, 2012). According to Christiane Amanpour, one of the most famous, long-serving war correspondents for CNN, the boundaries between the sexes blur, at least in journalism. She acknowledges the need for equal representation of men and women in many areas of social life: politics, business, education, and especially in the media on all levels of the editorial process, in front or behind the camera. Over more than twenty years of Christiane Amanpour's work, profound changes have ensued in the media. This observation refers to both the fact of women occupying jobs previously reserved for men (reporters, producers, camera operators) and the way of construing messages. At present, women cover issues aimed at men and women alike (in the past messages delivered by women were at the same time targeted at women) and are more frequently involved in covering crises, wars, catastrophes or political elections than was the case before. According to Amanpour, the increasing role of women in various areas of social life is a long-term and wise investment which is bound to give a return. Women's presence is followed by progress, and therefore profits. This considerable representation of women is particularly welcome in journalism; while in many Western organizations there have been more active women in the media, too few of them are still decision-makers in press editorial teams. Regardless of the country of employment, women typically need to laboriously climb the professional ladder (*Women Make the News*, 2017). Postulating the greater presence of women as media managers or directors of news stations, Amanpour is also aware of the negative changes in the media, such as closing down overseas branches, limiting the number of correspondents, or the prevalence of sensation-oriented national news over coverage of international conflicts (Wężyk, 2012).

When defining journalism as a professional activity in the mass media related to gleaning, verifying, selecting and disseminating information, comments and entertaining messages, it is worth noting that journalists are not a homogenous social category. Depending on position in a media organization, as well as the type of the medium, journalists vary with respect to tasks and opinions on the essence of journalism. A journalist is usually a member of a hierarchical organization based on a division of labor and determining subordinate relationships. Every journalist is subject to media law and the principles governing local editorial teams i.e. the media organization's structure. Journalist freedom is limited by

the editorial team's external environment, the law, politics and economy. Technical changes to communication in the media are also of importance. Civic journalists are an exception from the hierarchical work style, as their activity is targeted at close contacts within local communities, typically by means of new media. As Iwona Leonowicz-Bukała noticed, what differentiates civic journalists from professional ones is lack of remuneration (Leonowicz-Bukała, 2015, p. 254). However, even in this group, journalistic autonomy is not absolute.

Managing diversity in the media

More and more frequently, employers realize that in effective management, including media structure management, the differences between male and female employees need to be taken into account. In managing diversity, an assumption is made that diversity at work is among an organization's key assets, contributing to development and profits. The notion defines the diversity of values and opinions, competences, skills, talents, experiences, work styles, modes of communication, decision making, resolving conflicts or professional aspirations (Sznajder, 2013, pp. 6–7). While the managerial role of women is increasingly appreciated, and research shows that a larger share of women in supervisory boards and on high managerial positions may result in an organization's increased effectiveness, there are still differences in the positions of men and women in the mass media. According to Daria Bazydło-Egier, employing more women in managerial positions boosts a company's competitiveness in the industry by tapping into larger human resources (Bazydło-Egier, 2017, pp. 46–47).

Managing diversity in an editorial team stands for perceiving and taking into account diversity also with respect to gender. As Denis McQuail notices, gender always affects the organizational context, but it does so in different ways and with very different results (McQuail, 2008, pp. 303–304). However, he is rather cautious about the correlations between male domination in a majority of media organizations, the male perspective and patriarchal values on the one hand, and the content of the coverage. He comments that there is no direct evidence that a better gender balance in journalism triggers off a change to the content of the coverage. Rather, that is determined by economic factors. What is more, McQuail sees the need for a more fundamental ap-

proach to the relation between gender and the media. While the number of women in editorial teams is consistently growing, the nature of information remains unchanged. Following an analysis of 1,000 news releases over ten years, McQuail concludes that female journalists do not tend to “use” women more as sources of information. When this does happen, it typically stems from the topics involved. The attitudes of female journalists are reflected in their tendency to talk about daily life, less humble attitude toward authority and their tendency to analyze political issues they cover. However, this behavior does not result from the idiosyncrasies of female journalism, but from the fact that male and female journalists are allocated specific topics. The styles of journalism mentioned above result from two separate issues: the conflict between journalistic autonomy and determination, and the willingness to change the nature of information. At the same time, neither of these issues denies the existence of differences between the sexes and does not provide an argument against employing an equal number of men and women in the media (McQuail, 2008, pp. 303–304). The number of female authors and recipients of mass messages is growing, especially in the new media. Women’s purchasing power is growing, and as a result they are more self-aware and in touch with their media needs and are able to communicate it. The ways in which women are active in the media are changing. The multi-dimensional nature of women’s participation in the mass media is a complex process conducive to policies of equal opportunity. However, the media reality shows that despite a growing number of female journalists, this area remains dominated by males, especially with respect to making key decisions in media organizations. Increasing female presence in public life and implementing policies of equal opportunities which revolve around a transition from a policy of anti-discrimination to acting for the benefit of genuine equality and management, does not translate into assuming managerial positions or more decision-making in the media on the part of women. What is more, the social stereotypes of the roles of men and women in the media still affect changes in the thinking about women and their position in media systems, both in the coverage and journalism. The situation of women in media organizations as we know them today oscillates between empowerment and objectification. The ways of using the media by men and women are changing. The image of the entertainment and commercially oriented contemporary media also results from women’s efforts to reinforce their position in mass media communication.

Gender equality indicators in media organizations' policies

Bearing in mind the above, it seems reasonable to analyze the Gender Sensitive Indicators for Media, which stipulate the level of gender equality and the position of women both in media organizations and the content of the messages, irrespective of the communication technology at play (Gender-Sensitive Indicator, 2012). This is done further on in this paper, with reference to a UNESCO report featuring a catalogue of data used to analyze efforts to ensure gender equality in the media. With these issues in mind, the indicators referring to promoting an equal position with respect to gender in media organizations' structures will be discussed.

The scope of the criteria is diverse, and takes into consideration a number of important steps. The major areas include the issues of gender equality in making key decisions in editorial teams. The indicators in the first area reflect, among other things, the presence of women as owners of media organizations, managing media companies, board members, broadcasters, editors-in-chief, department and office directors. The data also shows regular reviews and reports on activities aimed at maintaining gender balance on the level of decision-making, the effectiveness of policies of equal rights with executive measures, goals, schedules and monitoring mechanisms. The indicators show to what extent a gender equality policy has been adopted in an editorial team, in order to overcome any barriers and limitations and to enhance the working conditions of women (part-time employment, shared and transparent criteria of professional promotion). These criteria also indicate the budget necessary to implement a policy of equal opportunities and show affirmative activities increasing women's representation in the decision-making process. They make it easier to propagate a policy of gender balance in decision making (*Gender-Sensitive Indicator*, 2012, pp. 22–23).

In the second area, related to employment conditions and recognizing men's and women's skills at work, the indicators determine, among other things, the presence of institutions or individuals in charge of monitoring gender equality in the labor market. Additionally, they show the proportions of men and women in various areas of media activity, for instance in creating information or producing programs, and on all the levels of a media company. They also identify equal employment conditions and benefits, including pension rights. On top of that, the indicators reveal the proportions of people employed for a specified period of time, part-time workers, and people creating and leading various news topics. In addition, the

indicators monitor safe work environments for men and women (separate bathrooms, transport amenities, accommodation following work at night). From a woman's perspective, a safe work environment in a media company involves a policy preventing sexual harassment or mobbing. Regardless of sex, equality of remuneration is a particularly important aspect of any job. Equal remuneration means equal pay for the same value of work, regardless of gender, and a transparent payroll system, using the same criteria in order to determine the remuneration structure of men and women. The systems controlling remuneration, and regular internal audits, coupled with job contracts ensuring equal remuneration for men and women are all elements of equal remuneration. Keeping a balance between professional and private lives is an important issue related to the conditions of work for a media company, especially in the case of women. Therefore, flexible work forms, all employees' access to maternity/paternity leave or child care leave for a sufficient time, as well as social support and the healthcare of children are crucial (*Gender-Sensitive Indicator*, 2012, pp. 24–28).

The third area is related to gender equality in trade unions, associations, clubs and journalist organizations, as well as committees in charge of media sector regulations. This includes equal presence of women in the above-mentioned structures of the decision-making processes on all rungs of the editorial ladder, the existence of structures and entities promoting gender equality at work and inclusion of gender equality into media practice. In this aspect, of special importance are the indicators related to the system of monitoring women's presence and activity in decision making in editorial teams, promoting activities and training on leadership in organizations, taking into account the proportion of men and women in an organization's work, in the registers of member organizations and during voting. The same holds true for regular meetings of all the structures promoting gender equality and the suggested recommendations for the media and political decision-makers (*Gender-Sensitive Indicator*, 2012, pp. 29–32).

In the fourth area of equality, a gender-balanced policy in an editorial team is reflected predominantly in promoting codes of ethics and an equality-friendly policy in media coverage. Its goal is to increase institutional involvement in gender equality in media companies with respect to the content of the messages.

The last area refers to equality in education and training of journalists and media employees, as well as students of journalism. In this area, the following indicators are also taken into consideration: the percentage of male and female academic teachers of journalism, and the presence

of men and women in the authorities of journalism faculties (*Gender-Sensitive Indicator*, 2012, pp. 33–37).

There are also other criteria indicating the equal position of men and women in a media company. A report of the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE), which was selected as a European centre of knowledge on gender equality in the area of women and the media, presents a number of important relevant findings (*Beijing+20*, 2015, p. 1). In 2013, the indicators used to evaluate men's and women's participation in media companies in the European Union were approved. While the report showed progress in the policy of employing women in media structures and decision-making processes, at the same time it revealed insufficient representation of women in editorial teams and media authorities. Despite the fact that employment in the media has grown in the past two decades (as the report suggests), women accounted for only 44% of people employed in 2011 in the media (the press, the radio and TV) (*Beijing+20*, 2015, p. 2). The insufficient representation of women was particularly acute in several areas of media activity. Attention is drawn to three fundamental criteria referring to the extent to which a policy of equal opportunity is implemented in an editorial team. The first indicator refers to the scale of increasing the presence and access of women to decision-making processes when creating messages and influencing the strategy of a media company. The second criterion refers to the share of women in media companies' management boards and media councils. This indicator also refers to all the types of broadcasters, with special emphasis placed on public media. The third criterion reveals the extent to which activities of an editorial team for the benefit of gender equality are promoted.

The results of the EIGE report indicate that the share of men and women on all levels of decision-making is not balanced and shows a male prevalence in the majority of journalistic activities. The results show that in the European Union 32% women occupy top positions in media companies, against 68% top jobs held by men (*Beijing+20*, 2015, p. 2). As the importance of the jobs in media structures grows, the percentage of women declines, revealing the "glass ceiling" phenomenon. In the period in question, women represented barely 21% of CEOs and 16% of presidents in media companies (*Beijing+20*, 2015, p. 2).

In 2012, women represented 26% of board members in media companies i.e. slightly less than top managerial positions (*Review*, 2013, p. 35). The report also shows the differences in employment of women in editorial teams with respect to the broadcasters' ownership sectors. As for public

media in the European Union, women occupied 35% of managerial positions against 65% of men (*Review*, 2013, p. 32). At the same time, women represented on average 29% of media companies' board members and 21% of board members in private media organizations (*Review*, 2013, p. 33). Research carried out by the European Institute for Gender Equality also suggests that in the period in question, the top positions in public media organizations in the European Union were 22% occupied by women; in the case of commercial broadcasters this is 12% (*Review*, 2013, p. 28).

The unequal distribution of jobs in media companies between men and women is also reflected in the membership structure of 44 media regulatory boards in Europe with women occupying only 31% of the jobs (*Review*, 2013, p. 36). Lately, these indicators have slightly increased. The biggest number of women is employed in the media sector regulatory board in Bulgaria. On the other hand, there are no women in the equivalent boards in Italy or Slovenia. Since 2016, there have been two women members of the Polish National Broadcasting Council. Notably, women working in the structures of media organizations in Northern and Central Europe have clearly enjoyed professional promotion. As for Poland, the indicators are not homogenous, for instance there are no female members on the board of the public TV and radio broadcasters. While gender is an important diversity criterion in Poland, this rule has a very slight influence on media organizations.

Conclusions

To summarize and refer to the research questions posed at the beginning of the article it can be stated that at present, despite increasing female participation in the media, the situation of women in media companies is not very promising. The same holds true for women's prospects of occupying managerial jobs in the media. It is estimated that parity will be achieved as late as in 2085. While in many European countries women are highly represented in media companies (Sweden, Russia), they are very frequently marginalized, both in journalism, especially in top managements of editorial teams, and in the content of the disseminated information. Most narratives in information media are produced by men, irrespective of the medium. Men express their opinions in the media more often than women, presented as authorities, discussing political, legal, economic or scientific issues. There have been frequent cases of women

being disregarded in professional organizations representing journalists. Too frequently, women in media companies face the stereotype of man as the sex better prepared for work in the media.

Therefore, in order to adopt a gender equality policy in media companies, women's and men's rights should be equally considered in journalism, especially with respect to recruitment, remuneration, promotion and social issues. In an editorial team, the organizational culture should be based on the standards of managing diversity with its elements: values, norms, rules, habits, the language, symbols or modes of operation in a media company. What is more, broadcasters should strive to picture men and women in non-stereotypical professional and family roles. Thirdly, the issues of counteracting inequality on account of gender in media companies should be included in the programs of journalist education. Equal opportunity policies in media organizations in the context of gender stand predominantly for perceiving diversity in editorial teams, counteracting unequal treatment at work and gaining a competitive advantage based on diversity. This must generate profits.

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Równość płci w polityce organizacji medialnych – wybrane zagadnienia

Streszczenie

Równość płci rozumiana jako sprawiedliwe traktowanie kobiet i mężczyzn w każdej sferze życia społecznego to priorytet działań we współczesnej polityce wielu państw. W artykule podjęta została problematyka równych szans płci w organizacjach medialnych i w zawodzie dziennikarskim. W tekście omówiono zagadnienie dziennikarstwa, jako zawodu równych możliwości i ukazano ograniczenia, z jakimi spotykają się kobiety zajmujące się tą profesją. Wielowymiarowa i złożona obecnie pozycja kobiet w mediach jest wypadkową wielu istotnych uwarunkowań historycznych, społecznych, kulturowych, politycznych i ekonomicznych. W artykule ukazano ponadto kwestię zarządzania różnorodnością w organizacji medialnej i określono podstawowe wskaźniki równości płci w polityce redakcji. W zakończeniu zwrócono uwagę na potrzebę różnorodności, przeciwdziałania nierównemu traktowaniu i uwzględnianie w równym stopniu praw kobiet i mężczyzn w polityce organizacji medialnych w kwestiach rekrutacji, wynagrodzeń, awansu zawodowego i spraw socjalnych.

Słowa kluczowe: kobiety, media, polityka równości w organizacjach medialnych, kobiety w zawodzie dziennikarskim