

LIFELONG LEARNING – A RESPONSE TO A COMPLEX MARKETING STRATEGY OVERCOMING THE GENDER GAP

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Abstract

One of the main concerns nowadays, all over the world, is related to the fact that there is no society which can provide equal opportunities for women and men. In this paper we are analyzing the fundamental categories of gender gap, such as: economic participation and opportunity, educational attainment and political empowerment and their levels in the European Countries. Further on, we reveal the correlations between gender gap, customer orientation and competitive advantage, as main aspects of a complex marketing strategy. In our opinion, a high level of customer orientation and innovation can be achieved through the specialization given by the lifelong learning.

Keywords: *Lifelong Learning, Gender Equality, Gender Gap, Customer Orientation, Competitive Advantage.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Equality between women and men is one of European Union's fundamental values, expected to be integrated into all EU policies and funding programmes (Jourova 2015, 7). Women's integration in both politics and breadwinning was considered by Hernes (1987) to be the fundamental aspect regarding gender equality (Borchorst and Siim 2008, 211). This hypothesis was criticized lately, being considered a too simplistic overview on such a complex theme, being also identified other representative routes to gender equality (Pfau-Effinger, 1998).

In order to "identify priorities for future policy action in the field of gender equality at EU-level", DG Justice and Consumers launched a public consultation on "Equality between women and men in the EU" that received almost 5,000 contributions from across Europe (European Commission 2015, 23). After this high response to the launched consultation, an official document was elaborated - *Analysis of public consultation "Equality between women and men in the EU"*.

There were identified six important problems that have to be targeted in the period 2016-2020, as follows:

1. Women are still paid less than men for the same work or work of equal value (identified urgency of inequality by 28% of questionnaire's respondents);
2. The number of women in positions of power in politics and business is small comparative to men in the same positions (17.1%);
3. The prejudice caused by preconceived ideas on women's image and role is still manifested (20.2%);
4. Violation of women's rights is present worldwide (17.7%);
5. Gender-based violence is still persistent (15.6%);
6. There is unequal sharing of household tasks between women and men (11.4%) (European Commission 2015, 23).

With the same objective of identifying the most important routes for these problems and the way to equilibrate them, Fraser (1997, 41-66) emphasizes on three visions for achieving gender equity, that are strongly related to the gendered division of care and breadwinning and configuration of market, state and family (Borchorst and Siim 2008, 211). These visions were resumed into three models, as follows:

1. *The universal breadwinner model* has at its basis universalization of the breadwinner role, emphasizing gender sameness. In this context, women and men are both citizen workers with the same responsibilities and engagements, and care duties are transferred to the formal infrastructure of the state.

2. *The caregiver parity model* is keeping care work within the family, yet it reevaluates it through public assistance, *i.e.* caregiver allowances. In this way, the informal work within the family is tried to be valued and remunerated for assuring the balance between job and personal life.

3. *The universal caregiver model* focuses on gender segregation in order to remove this persistent problem. It proposes a family in which both women and men share the parental responsibilities related to care (informal work) and breadwinning (taking a job).

In our opinion, this is the most feasible model from the three above-mentioned ones, especially because it obeys in the most appropriate way the principle of equality of opportunities between men and women as a whole, being able to stay at the core of a healthy, solid and stable family, capable to offer a proper home for children. Another strength point is that is the easiest model to be put into practice on condition of promoting the change of preconceived ideas about the gender role in the family and society. Fraser (1997) also shows a clear preference for the third model, considering that it manages post-industrial dilemmas and changes the equality-difference issues related to men and women in an adequate way. As a result, it is capable to dismantle the gender opposition between care and breadwinner altogether (Borchorst and Siim 2008, 212).

Women's multiple roles in the society were concentrated into a typology of gender structures of labor, intimacy, and citizenship in a project entitled *Policy Frames and Implementation Problems: the Case of Gender Mainstreaming (MAGEEQ)* based on the researches of Walby, Connell, Verloo and Roggeband (Lombardo and Meier 2008, 6). Subjects like division between labor and care or paid and unpaid work were discussed in the organization of labor part, and considered as based on a hierarchy between women and men that places the first ones in a subordinate position. Norms, values, institutions and different organizations related to personal life were taken into discussion in the part dedicated to the intimacy aspect from the typology of gender structures (called organization of intimacy). Also, in the organization of citizenship, another hierarchy between men and women is mentioned

related to the main civil, political, and social rights, the voice of decision-making being emphasized as an important issue here (Lombardo and Meier 2008, 6). In relation with these aspects, the concept of gender equality in EU is designed in an interdependent manner and organized as four kinds of policies: 1) *family policies* and 2) *domestic violence* – the correspondent of organization of intimacy; 3) *gender inequality in politics* – the correspondent of organization of citizenship and 4) *work policies* – the correspondent of organization of labor (Jourova 2015).

All urgencies related to gender gap and all policies elaborated for reducing this gap can be divided into two distinct parts: the political-economic part and the cultural-valuational one (Fraser 2007, 25). So, the lower paid for work of equal value, the small number of women in position of power in politics and business, the unequal poverty and employment rates are urgencies integrated into the political-economic dimension. In the same way, preconceived ideas about the image and role of women and men, violation of women's rights, the unequal share of household tasks and caring are urgencies of cultural and valuational dimension.

The equality gender policies are also related and possibly divided into the two mentioned dimensions. This perspective is influenced by the theory of Fraser (2007), sustaining the existence of a *two dimensional conception of gender* – 1) redistribution and 2) recognition, because *only such a conception can support a viable feminist politics in the present era* (Fraser 2007, 25). This is because women are asking for equal rights both in terms of work/remuneration and of identity recognition. In this way, the policies of redistribution should be correlated with the policies of recognition for achieving better results for gender objectives.

This complete approach must be taken into consideration by policymakers because it has to be clear that resolving the payment gap is a big positive step, but not enough. If women are equally paid for equal work, this does not mean that they are equally treated in the society, *i.e.* financial similarity does not guarantee that recognition is also assured. Similarly, changing of the prejudicial and preconceived ideas about the image and role of women and men in a

positive way in terms of equality does not guarantee an equal level of payment for work of equal value.

2. GENDER GAP IN THE EUROPEAN UNION

One of the most popular indices used to measure the equality between women and men is the *Global Gender Gap Index*, published in the annual report of The World Economic Forum. It is an index that “examines the gap between men

and women in four fundamental categories (sub-indexes): *Economic Participation and Opportunity*, *Educational Attainment*, *Political Empowerment and Health and Survival*” (Schwab 2015). We mention that we will focus on the global index and on its first three sub-indexes.

The aim of this part of the paper is to analyze the levels of gender gap in all the 28 EU countries and to compare them for having a general perspective in terms of regional similarities and needs for improvements in this part of the world.

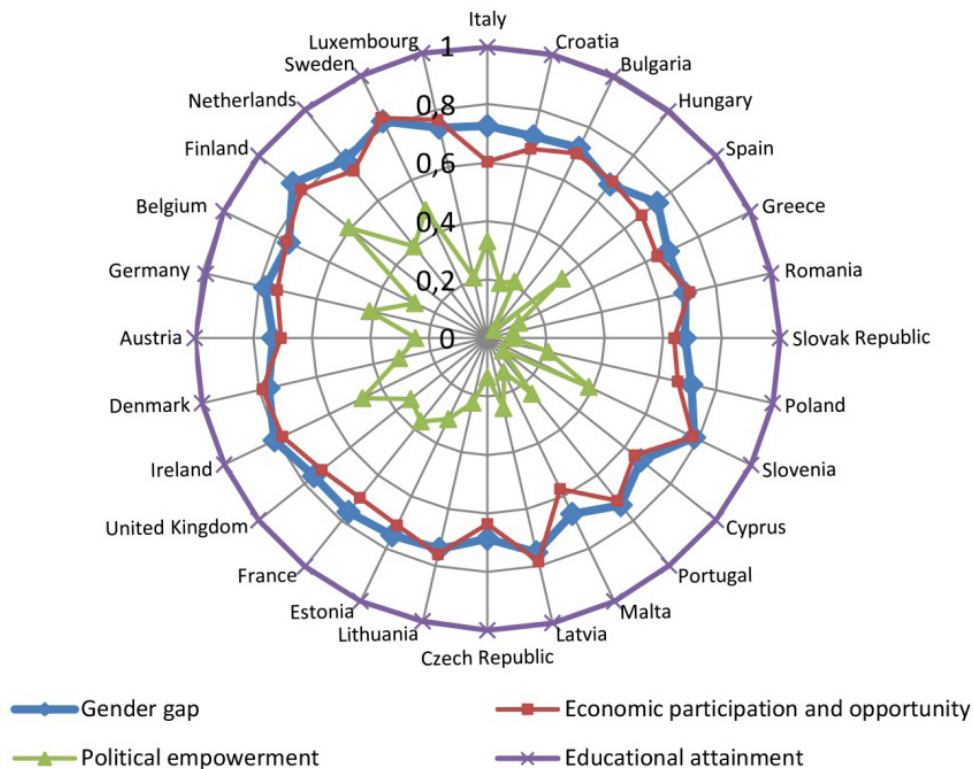


Fig. 1. Gender gap and its fundamental categories in 2015 – comparative levels in the EU countries

(0 = inequality; 1 = equality)
 (data source: *The Global Gender Gap Report 2015*)

At first sight, it can be observed that, even if we refer to the composite index (*i.e.* Gender Gap) – essential for the overall gender gap, or if we analyze its components (*i.e.* economic participation and opportunity of women compared to men, political empowerment and educational attainment of women), all dimensions of gender aspects, analyzed separately, appear as quite uniform. This means that the national levels of a dimension, for example, gender gap,

are close one to another. This can be observed in Fig. 1, where especially the first three dimensions (educational attainment, gender gap and economic participation and opportunity) are balanced alongside the circle. More than that, the levels of *Educational attainment* are almost superposed with the circumference of the circle. In this sub-index, “the gap between women’s and men’s current access to education is captured through ratios of women to men in primary-,

secondary- and tertiary-level education” (Schwab 2015, 4). Also, the *Economic participation and opportunity* sub-index “contains three concepts: the participation gap, the remuneration gap and the advancement gap” (Schwab 2015, 4).

The major difference in terms of national levels is related to the political empowerment of women, possibly observable in two ways: 1) between countries and 2) between the levels of the three fundamental categories of the *Gender Gap Index*. “This sub-index measures the gap between men and women at the highest level of political decision-making through the ratio of women to men in minister-level positions and the ratio of women to men in parliamentary positions” (Schwab 2015, 4).

So, if we analyze the first aspect, *i.e.* the difference between countries, it can be seen that the 28 EU countries can be divided into four groups in terms of national levels of political empowerment of women: 1) the first group with the highest levels (*i.e.* between 0.5-0.6) represented by Finland, Ireland and Sweden; 2) the second group, with levels between 0.4-0.5 - Slovenia, Germany, France and Netherlands; 3) the third group, with levels between 0.3-0.4 - Italy, Spain, Estonia, Denmark, Belgium, Portugal, Latvia, Lithuania, Austria and 4) the last group, with levels lower than 0.2 - Croatia, Bulgaria, Poland, Hungary, Greece, Romania, Slovak Republic, Malta, Czech Republic.

Analyzing the difference between the three fundamental categories evidences that all

countries offer low levels of political empowerment compared with those of economic participation and opportunity, and educational attainment. As a conclusion of this comparative perspective, we can state that, although countries have evolved very much in the two mentioned directions (especially in educational attainment, where the level equal to 1 – meaning equality – is attained in almost all 28 countries), the category measuring political empowerment is very low, with levels almost equal with 0 – meaning total inequality – in some countries. In other words, to improve the global gender gap, a lot of attention must be offered to the improvement of this category, empowering women in the political area.

Referring to gender gap in general, although the levels are not very different in the EU countries (between 0.67 – Malta and 0.85 - Finland), still some particularities can be observed. For example, the countries with the highest gender gap from EU are from Southern Europe (the Eastern part): Malta, Greece, and Cyprus, but also from Central Europe (again the Eastern part): Romania, Hungary, Slovakia and Czech Republic. These countries have many similar cultural and economic characteristics and, as we have detailed in the first part of the paper, the aspect of gender gap is a two-dimensional variable that correlates, on the one hand, the problematics of the equality between men and women from a cultural perspective and, on the other hand, from an economic one.

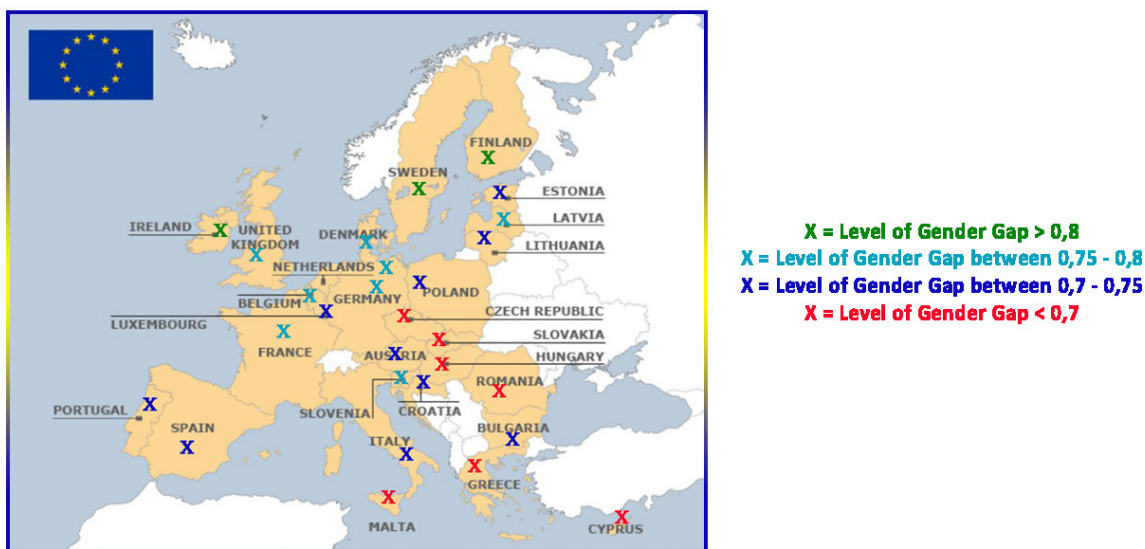


Fig. 2. The global gender gap in the EU member states map

Irregularities in the regional distribution on the EU map can be identified when the next level of the gender gap is taken into discussion (*i.e.* between 0.7 - 0.75), the countries offering it being of all parts of Europe.

The Western Europe is quite uniform because all its EU countries offer levels of gender gap between 0.75 - 0.80, with the exception of Ireland (0.81 - one of the highest points of all 28 countries taken into discussion) and Luxembourg (0.74) (belonging to the precedent group - the one with levels between 0.7 - 0.75).

The highest points are obtained by Finland (0.85), Sweden (0.82) and, as already mentioned, by Ireland (0.81). Taking into consideration that 0 means total inequality and 1 means total equality, the situation is worse than it looks like at first sight, because even the most developed countries from Europe are not capable of offering equality between men and women. More than that, although the difference between the highest (0.85) and the lowest level (0.67) is equal to 0.18 points, it is obvious that, in real life, the consequences are felt in a more persistent and concrete way. This is because this kind of inequality has a major influence on women's well-being, especially on the ones that are both workers and single mother caregivers.

As a direct consequence of this reality, it goes without saying that more efforts must be done in order to improve the levels of gender gap and thus, to offer equality between men and women for the sake of the national welfare. This improvement is a way to prove that the modern societies are capable to assure more justice and equal rights for all their citizens, no matter if they are men or women.

According to the analysis of indexes and sub-indexes, the lowest levels of global gender gap and, especially political empowerment of women, can be found in almost all countries of South-Eastern Europe whose levels of development are also not as high as, for example, the ones provided by the countries from Western Europe. It seems that the equality between men and women, including the latter ones implication in politics and their levels of participation in the political decisions, have much to do with the level of welfare of a society. In other words, in general, the countries capable to provide a high standard

of living for their citizens are also capable to offer much more openness and acceptance for women, who can thus play an important role in national decisions.

Anyway, it is difficult to establish the direction of the influence between the two variables and to decide which determines the other (*i.e.*, a high level of development determines a high level of gender equality or, in the opposite way, a high level of equality between men and women impacts on the level of development, thus improving it). What is sure is that the most developed countries from EU offer more equality between men and women, including political empowerment, as shown in Fig. 2.

3. GENDER GAP, THE NATURE OF COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE AND CUSTOMER ORIENTATION

Going deeper, according to *The Global Competitiveness Report* (Schwab 2016), the most developed countries are defined as *innovation-driven economies*. One of the major characteristics of such an economy is that their businesses have to *compete with new and unique products*. At this stage, companies must compete by producing new and different goods using the most sophisticated production processes, and by innovating new ones. These countries are forced to be especially oriented to customer needs and to focus on innovation as their competitive advantage, in order to best respond to the requirements of the markets. In this way, a strong correlation is established between the two variables, namely:

- 1) **nature of the competitive advantage** in international markets based on either primarily low-cost labor/natural resources or primarily unique products and processes, *i.e.* innovation, and
- 2) **customer orientation**, resuming the attitude of producers *vs* their customers, that can be either indifferent to customer satisfaction or highly responsive to it, while seeking for customer retention (Schwab 2016), really exists (0.73) in the EU countries, meaning that the ones that offer primarily unique products and processes are highly responsive to customers and seek customer retention (Table 1).

One of the crucial elements of a competitive company is to have best specialists capable to maintain a high innovative level. In this case, it is expected that the innovative countries have much more openness in offering equal opportunities to all members of the society, without making differences between genders, when the problem of recruitment is brought into discussion. As Table 1 reveals, the correlation between **gender gap** and the **nature of competitive advantage** is 0.624, while the correlation between **gender gap** and **customer orientation** is 0.683. Therefore, the value of correlation is sufficiently high to decide that, between the specified variables, strong relations exist, and also that the degree of offering innovation and customer orientation is related to the openness in offering equal gender opportunities.

Table 1. Correlations between gender gap, customer orientation and competitive advantage in the EU member states
(source: *The Global Competitiveness Report 2016*)

Correlations	Gender gap	Customer orientation	Competitive advantage
Gender gap	1.000	0.683	0.624
Customer orientation	0.683	1.000	0.732
Competitive advantage	0.624	0.732	1.000

To better understand the relation between the three dimensions, *i.e.* gender gap, customer orientation and nature of competitive advantage, a 3-D scatter was elaborated (Fig. 3). The correlation is clear, the figure proving that, generally, countries with gender equality (close to 1) also offer high levels of customer orientation and innovation. Consequently, countries with high levels of gender gap (close to 0) implicitly record low levels of the other two variables taken into discussion.

As this scatter reveals, the EU member states have a quite good position between the 109 countries taken into analysis in *The Global Competitiveness Report 2015-2016* (Schwab 2016), offering, in most of its cases, namely the ones

with highest scores in terms of gender gap, competitive advantage and customer orientation. But, as it can be clearly seen, improvements along all three dimensions are still necessary for having a society that offers equality between men and women - variable correlated with customer orientation and nature of competitive advantage.

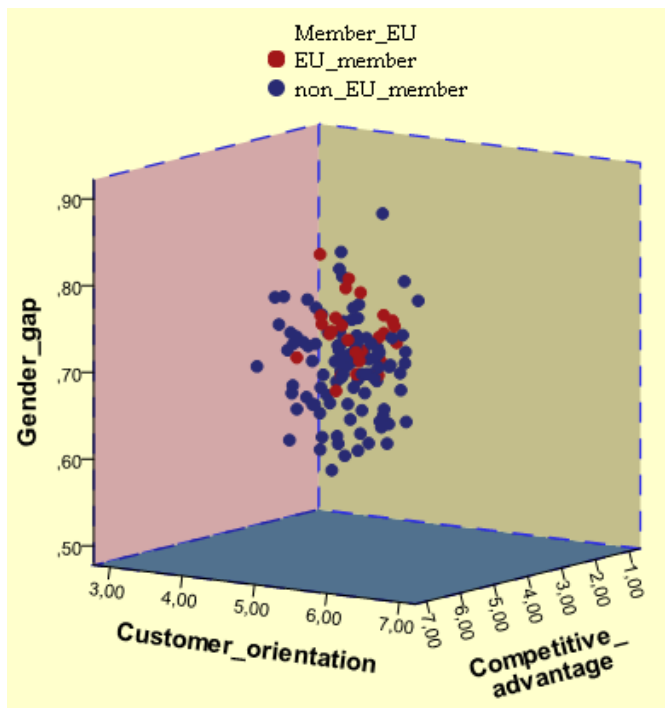


Fig. 3. Correlation between gender gap, customer orientation and competitive advantage in 109 countries of the world classified in terms of EU member/non-membership
(source: *The Global Competitiveness Report 2016*)

4. LIFELONG LEARNING - A POSSIBLE SOLUTION TO GENDER GAP

The Human Development Report (2015) emphasizes the importance of the active role of women in society, stating that “women who earn income from work often achieve greater economic autonomy and decision-making power within families, workplaces and communities”, also gaining “confidence, security and flexibility”. Considering the fact that, on the labor market, the demand is usually much higher than the offer, a society that does not offer gender equality of opportunities represents an important barrier for the women that want to take a job.

Unfortunately, as we have discovered in the precedent part of the paper, there is no country capable to offer equality, meaning a gender gap index equal to 1. Even the most developed nations only tend to attain this level and, through direct and indirect policies, with direct and indirect influences given by the economic, political, social environment, try to improve the imperfections of their systems in terms of lack of gender equality.

Lifelong learning is capable to form an important part of European policy related to gender gap, for the improvement of women's employment, enhancing their personal development and contributing to a more inclusive European society. As we concluded in the precedent part of the paper, one of the reasons for the fact that developed societies are open to assure more equal opportunities in terms of gender is the need for high levels of customer orientation and innovation, main elements of an economically developed country. These high standards in terms of marketing strategy may be possibly attained only through high levels of specialization. This aspect can be fulfilled by a continuous practice of the lifelong learning principle. In other words, it is imperative to provide opportunities for women to access education, which can improve the human capital (Samans *et al.*, 2015, 6). Apparently, lifelong learning seems fundamental for ensuring that they can access jobs and build a career. In fact, the literature reveals that poverty and income inequality can be reduced through several channels, such as more and better-paid jobs (Azevedo 2013). Enabling the conditions for the private sector to create jobs for the women, while ensuring that they have the skills to access them, can be one key for the inclusive growth in conditions of unequal opportunities. The desire for a qualified working force with the necessary skills and competences became the motivation for lifelong learning (Carlsen *et al.*, 2016, 52). Thus, lifelong learning became one of the main means to increase productivity, development of human capital, science and technology (Carlsen *et al.*, 2016, 52).

In this context, lifelong learning should be viewed as a priority, as it contributes greatly to employment, economic prosperity and employability, while also providing the means to all citizens to accomplish their potentials,

regardless of their gender (Council of the European Union 2009).

5. CONCLUSIONS

As outlined in the first part of the paper, there are some problems that need to be solved in the future, related to the equality between women and men in the EU. These are: lower payment for work of equal value; small number of women in position of power in politics and business; unequal share of household tasks; unequal share of caring; unequal poverty rate; unequal employment rate; preconceived ideas about the image and the role of women and men; violation of women's rights (European Commission 2015, 23).

All these facets related to gender gap and all policies elaborated for reducing this gap can be divided into two distinct parts: the political-economic part and the cultural-valuational one, however the approach should be an interdependent one.

Referring to gender gap in EU, the country levels are not very different, but the countries with the highest gender gap are from the South-Eastern Europe, while almost equal gender opportunities are registered in the Northern countries. Generally, countries with gender equality (close to 1) also offer high levels of customer orientation and innovation, whereas countries with high levels of gender gap (close to 0) implicitly have low levels of the other two variables taken into discussion.

The high standards in terms of marketing strategy may be possibly attained through high levels of specialization that can be fulfilled through lifelong learning.

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