

Abstract

Both gender equality and education policy are important priorities on the political agenda in Europe. The Research and Training Network "Women in European Universities" focuses on higher education and women's career-perspectives in systems of higher education of seven European countries (Austria, France, Germany, Poland, Spain, Sweden and the United Kingdom). The main focus of the project is to explore the "glass-ceiling" that women meet when they chose a career in academia and strive for top rank positions such as professorships.

As a first step in our research, it is important to understand the different systems of higher education, as well as recent changes and challenges to women in academia. This contextual analysis is one result of the first phase of the research project and shall provide information about the Swedish system of higher education.

The Swedish system of higher education underwent fundamental changes in both organisational form and ideological practice during the last thirty years. Especially the three reforms in the 90's gave the higher education system in Sweden a new face: They gave more weight to management structures, fixed-term contracts and focused more on an Anglo-American model of higher education than on the "old" Humboldtian model. The reforms brought important changes for the Swedish system of higher education, but certain patterns remain untouched. One can still find the "hidden binary system" within university colleges representing institutions to undergraduate education and universities that offer post-graduate education and research. And to a certain extent, this builds the ground for the remaining persistence of sex-specific divisions in both fields of study and different posts on the academic career ladder.