



Information Society

Consultation Workshop on Gender and Technology

Brussels, 28 June 2004

Draft Report

1. RATIONALE AND SCOPE

The workshop aimed to discuss topics and strategies and to propose ideas that would help promote women's participation in the Information Society in a more coherent and sustainable way.

Another purpose of this workshop was to assure input for a session on gender at the IST2004 Conference in The Hague in November 2004. This session was proposed to run tentatively under the catchy title "Virtual Harem".

The agenda brought together a variety of views and suggestions. **The first presentation aimed at drawing a historically accurate picture of the "harem" as one form of institutionalized social exclusion in 18th and 19th century Ottoman society, and at investigating whether the Information Society was in danger of facilitating new or similar forms of exclusion, i.e. "virtual harems". The second presentation examined the degenderization of Information Society, the inequitable and discriminatory distribution of the technological infrastructure in the public school system of Greece, the need to raise the level of techno-competence through a) the public school system, b) continuing education, c) collaboration with the technology industry, d) interdisciplinary academic/scientific research, and c) the formulation of a 'Socio-technoethics' code.** Another presentation described the possibilities of mentoring as a tool to promote female role models in business and research. The final presentation aimed at offering practical suggestions as to how to raise awareness and promote a more balanced gender distribution in Information Society.

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2. SUMMARIES OF PRESENTATIONS

2.1. Harems

The first presentation examined the organisational structure, the female network of power and the pyramidal hierarchy of the 18th and 19th century harems in Ottoman society. Dr Kamberidou presented the intricate organisation and the multiethnic composition of the Imperial Harem—an institution of women's slavery—and the survival strategies and strategies of self-empowerment of the harem inmates. This example, the 'harem', was used to draw a parallel between the servitude to the privileged elite that also can be seen to exist when excluded or marginalized groups in today's society are powerless to take part in the rapidly expanding technological society.

2.2. The Virtual Harem: Technophobia or exclusion? An educational perspective.

The explosion of the rapidly advancing technological globalisation can be seen to have marginalized certain citizen groups and even whole countries outside the technological mainstream, which are not catered for in terms of possibilities to interact, influence and contribute to development and change. This in turn leads to an imbalance between the development of Information Society technologies and democratic achievement of the citizens of Europe. By ensuring that all social groups of European Society are included in the promotion, conception and development in the Information Society, a strengthened Europe will emerge. Technological advance may create further exclusion in the EU and may lead to a globalisation of new “virtual elites”.

The problems associated with virtual exclusion include: Discrimination, electronic conspiracy networks; electronic terrorism; violation of the electronic personality; domination of the imaginary; explosion of pornography; slave trafficking of women and children; castrated human subjects etc. To prevent “digital despotism” (i.e. the exclusion of certain groups due to their inability to follow the pace of technological developments set by the elite) and the further development of a “technological elite”, it is necessary to assure the educational prerequisites for equal opportunities. This would include not only the necessary infrastructure but also a non-discriminatory and equitable policy of distribution. A neglect of these preconditions could lead to the creation of a “Virtual Harem”, excluding large parts of the population, i.e. at lower hierarchy levels with no influence on the operational procedures.

The exclusion of groups of people from the Information Society is not only a gender issue but should be dealt with as social discrimination. Some measures to be taken in order to reverse these inequalities are as follows:

- (1) *Raise level of techno-competence through education by reforming technological education programmes and providing know how to as large as possible societal groups and ensuring a long term democratic operation of the educational system. **The institutionalization of mandatory technological training/education in the public school system’s curriculum, beginning in kindergarten and elementary school. Only in this way can the process of exclusion be eradicated and, in the long run, inclusion or incorporation into Information Society achieved.***
- (2) *The provision of a more equitable and non-discriminatory distribution of a technological infrastructure (pilot study results in Greece). Equal distribution of these resources in the public school system.*
- (3) *Technological Education or further technological training of specific social groups or non-mainstream groups, and primarily women of the lower socioeconomic classes, with the participation of the technology Industry, must be a major priority. If the technological system does not adopt as one of its basic operations and functions- in the framework of its ‘particular development logic’- ACTIVE PARTICIPATION IN THE EDUCATION PROCESSES of the social subject, in order to prepare the subject for integration or incorporation in Information Society, it endangers its own viability.*
- (4) *It is absolutely necessary to get more women who are working in this field and who are still underrepresented within this field involved—as active agents-- in the processes of technological design and composition. If we concentrate on the Exclusion of those social groups or women, who already have the know-how or who already have some form of access into IS, we need to empower them so they may be incorporated into the higher hierarchies and decision-making positions.*

- (5) *There should be a continuous dialogue to consolidate diverse needs for diverse users including citizens, experts and marginalized groups.*
- (6) *Need for more and better interdisciplinary research – Social sciences/ technological and gender research.*
- (4) *Develop a “socio-technoethos” or “socio-technoethics” (i.e. an ‘ethical code’ for participation in the Information Society) to systematically evaluate the ethical problems involved.*

Through such policies, measures and steps—in the medium and long term—social stereotypes of exclusion, demarcation and dichotomy, reproduced primarily in direct relation to socioeconomic levels or class, will eventually be wiped out.

A natural reaction to exclusion from the social production process that is increasingly taking place within the context of the Information Society is technology aversion or “technophobia”. It results from a failure of integration, and is a serious social problem, and if not fully taken into account, could eventually lead to the decomposition of Information Society.

The proposed “*technoethos*” or “*technoethics*” could serve as a tool for eliminating a further propagation of this aversion or technophobia. It should aim to influence mainstream IST development and formulation from a gender perspective as well as support technological education and adequate training measures, targeting both genders.

2.3. Mentoring Programme

The mentoring program at the Stockholm School of Economics aims to radically change the gender structure of the Swedish business community by promoting the female role and position. The methods implemented are: Visualisation of female role models; increased knowledge of gender and organisation; It also challenges the traditional role of male leadership that still prevails. This mentoring programme concentrates solely on female students currently enrolled at the Stockholm School of Economics (mentored) and powerful famous female executives at a high level acting as role models (mentors). Although the number of women at top management level has increased by 10% in the past nine years, it is far from the desired level of female leadership. The mentoring programme has chosen to work only with women as it is thought that this will be the most effect way of building the self image and influence of the women who are thought to become the “leaders of the future”.

The programme is based on three building blocks. It links on the one hand one-on-one mentoring sessions of students and female executives, with student group meetings and on the other with traditional lectures. This mentoring programme has been extended by offering the students themselves the possibility of acting themselves as mentors to high school students from an ethnically diverse suburb of Stockholm. This shows how this type of programme can be extended to include several generations for women.

The Feminist Organisation Studies (FOSFOR) combines teaching on Organisation and Gender, Change and Resistance to Change, Women and Leadership, and Gender-Power perspective.

A number of positive results have been reported by the students taking part in the mentor programme. It is considered to prepare young women better for working life and gender-based obstacles. It also provides them with continuous support through the established network. As such it increases women’s self confidence and provides increased gender awareness.

The mentors benefit from the programme through interaction with “tomorrow’s leaders” and their challenge of the mentors’ apprehension, and through close stimulating contact with the research community.

The prospective impact the mentorship programme is expected to have (or is having) on the business community, includes: Increased gender awareness, closer bond with education and research, ultimately thought to inspire and encourage more female leaders.

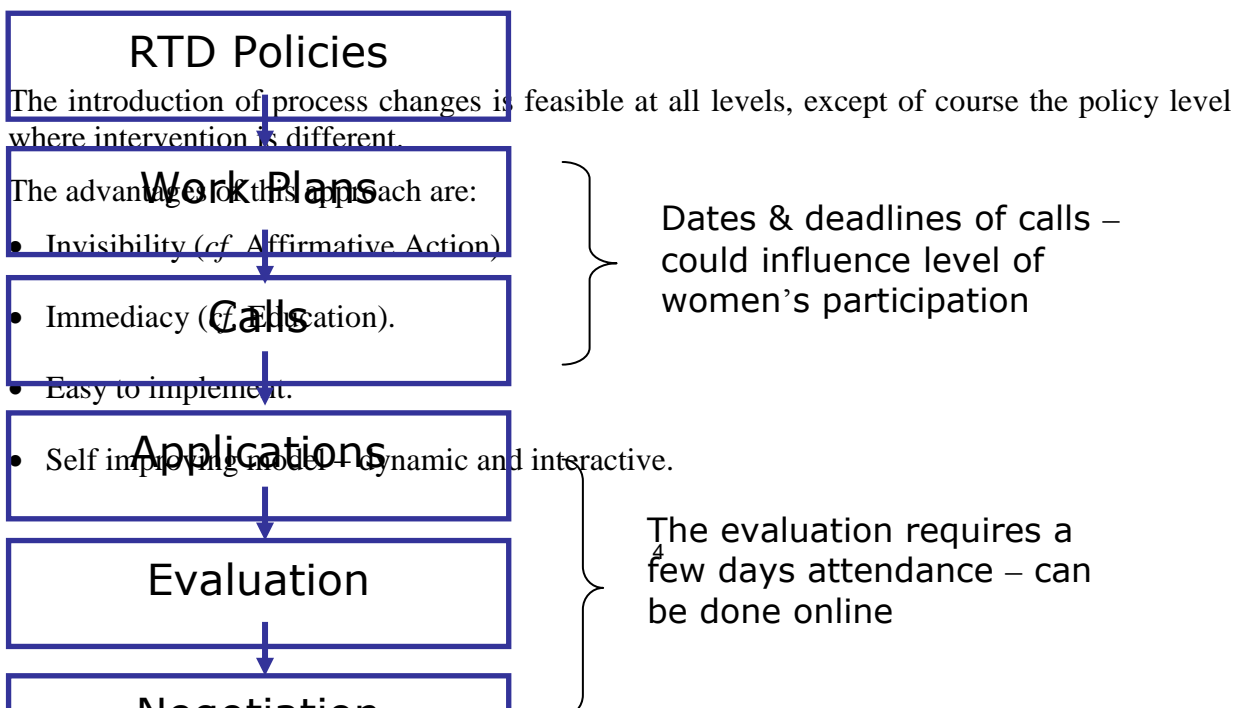
2.4. Towards a Pro-Active Integrated Approach to Gender Awareness and Evenly-Spread Distribution in Scientific & Technological Endeavours

Existing approaches have inherent problems that should be addressed. Despite the fact that *education* may be an effective tool, it takes very long time to show any results and have inherent problems. On the other hand affirmative actions are often coercive or create polemics and they also run the risk of having a negative impact. It is important to have a common ground with a gender-specific orientation instead of an overall social remedy. Proposed solutions could be:

- Identification of specific processes (e.g. FP6 R&D, Industrial R&D, academic basic research etc.) where intervention is possible;
- Decomposition of processes into components;
- Analysing each component to determine its influence (if any) on the final (desired) result. Intervention – based on the analysis, changing the identified influencing components;
- Perennial improvement – on-going monitoring / intervention that actually produce desired changes;
- Intervention – based on the analysis, changing the identified influencing components;

Continuous improvement based on the feedback from the -intervention monitoring and redesigning of action.

An Example – FP6



- No contradiction with other approaches.
- Cost effective.

3. CONCLUSIONS

The second part of the workshop was dedicated to brainstorming and debate on a future policy for gender integration in the Information Society. An extensive discussion took place on the name and structure of the gender related session on the IST event in The Hague. The title “Virtual Harem”, initially proposed, was considered to be too ambiguous to be used. It implied different meanings for different cultures and negative connotations. The participants agreed that it was unsuitable. A number of different titles were proposed such as:

- A Degendered Information Society
- Degendering the Information Society
- Is Technology Gender Neutral?
- Gender the gist of Information Society
- Gender e-Quality

After examination and in order to respect the deadlines, it was decided to use the title “e-Quality” for the workshop.

The discussions can be summarised as follows:

(1) The mentoring scheme established at the Stockholm School of Economics for female entrepreneurs to act as role models for young women could be used on a broader European scale, and in all Member States. This could possibly be done by initially encouraging European MEPs to act as mentors.

(2) Investigate FP6 processes and counter balance measures.

- Career development assurances despite enforced breaks
- Increase female evaluators: How? Child minding facilities, remote evaluation (reduce evening work)

(3) Generation of non-institutional (virtual) networks. Evenly distributed participation and synergy effects need to draw attention to differences that exist and to make sure that they do not become obstacles to equality. (4) Gender coordinator for all institutions.

(5) Socio-economic research alongside technological research within IST.

Research – Usability/ Work Programme – Socio-economic courses of imbalance and exclusion

(6) Awareness actions:

- “Girls Day” - Open days for girls to introduce them to IT research. This will also allow these companies to find the right (women) persons to present thinking of why they do what they do. IT from a woman’s perspective to attract female interest.
- Awareness measures: Roadshow/campaign/ “girls day”

- Cascading mentorship by role models on all levels.
- Constructive Dialogue: between the sexes, Technology-technophobic society groups, radical change versus smooth transition.

(7) Best practices exchange

- Gender balance responsibility versus companies' experiences
- Work towards establishing a 'code of (good) conduct' (technoethics)

(8) Assess IST procedures

Prepare report with conclusions/suggestions for change.

(9) Set up Working Group to prepare IST2004 session "e-quality" in The Hague.

Annex 1 - AGENDA

	Title	Speaker	Affiliation
09:30 - 10:00	Registration		
10:00 - 10:05	Welcome and Introductions	Dr Wolfgang Streitenberger	DG INFSO C European Commission
10:05 - 10:30	Workshop Road Map	Nancy Pascall Erastos Filos	DG INFSO C European Commission
10:30 - 11:00	Harems	Dr Irene Kamberidou	National and Kapodistrian University of Athens
11:00 - 11:30	Mentoring	Dr Monica Johansson Gender Equality Co-ordinator	Stockholm School of Economics
11:30 - 12:00	Education and Technology	Dr Irene Kamberidou Dr Nikolaos Patsantaras	National and Kapodistrian University of Athens
12:00 - 12:30	Proactive Dynamic Approach to Gender Awareness and Distribution	Prof. Zohar Ben- Asher	Global Research & Financing
12:30 - 14:00	Working Lunch		
14:00 - 14:10	Brainstorming (Ideas on paper)		
14:10 - 16:00	Discussion and elaboration of brainstorming ideas		
16:00 - 17:00	Finalization of the structuring of the Virtual Harem Session		

Annex 2 – List of Participants

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