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WOMEN AS TECHNICIANS IN WATERWORKS. DO THEY MAKE ANY DIFFERENCES? THE SWEDISH CASE

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THE SWEDISH WATER MANAGEMENT

In Sweden there is enough water for consumption. The problem hasn't been to get more water (with some exceptions at coasts and tourist places at the hills) but water with the right quality could be a problem to find. The wastewater treatment was a challenge during the 50's and 60's because a lot of rivers and recipients were contaminated. Today it is possible to fish at Stockholm and get very wealthy salmons.

The pioneers in water management were taken from military engineering, at the army the Swedish officers were very well known as excellent engineers and innovators.

The early history of consulting companies and water works is the history of very well educated officers from both the army as engineers and navy educated subofficers at the control rooms.

During the 80.s and especially in the 90 the situation became different. Some universities had made campaigns to get more women to the technical careers and some other universities as Luleå in the North, created new kind of faculties as "Society building engineer". There it was a lot of aims that interested women, not because women have another area of interest than men but because they have another experience of holistic thinking.

In the last 90's different EU programs there SAGA were involved worked very hard in the issue of empowerment and several projects had focus on incite young women to go in to technical jobs. It gave results and for example one of the most prestigious industrial secondary school in Sandviken, 200 km north of Stockholm, have the goal of having 50% of female pupils, they are near to reach that goal.

In the 90's and during the first years of the 2000 century, women became more "common people" at the water works, we can observe that between 1993 and 2003 the percentage of women working as engineers at water works increased with almost hundred percent.

But, does it make any differences?

My theory is that if women are in charge of the production of drinking water and waste water treatments do make differences. In a period of about ten years the water management has changed. From been a pure technical infrastructure problem it became an environmental and social issue. It is also a development, which depends on other issues as the Rio conference and so on. But in Sweden the changes did happen at the same period that women's incursion in two areas of engineering were very different. In energetic engineer, the situation is still the same with some minor changes, women are there still an exception, more than in water works. And the development within energy is more the classical, bigger plants, centralism, less environmental thinking but more technical solutions to environmental and social problems. So my thesis is: Women in water management, and not only as consumers, do make differences in the results.

THE METHOD OF THE THREE RS.

The Swedish municipalities association had worked an analytic method to study the situation of women in different branches.

The method calls 3R and it means an analysis of

Representation: How many women are there represented in managing the present issue?

Resources: Do women in fact have the same amount of resources, money, possibilities for post graduates studies or time than their male colleagues?

Reality: With the first two R:s (representation and resources) do women's reality within this activities make any differences for the real situation of women and men?

A prior analysis of the water works in Sweden shows that Representation is higher now than ten years ago, today there are almost 50% women in lower technical positions and almost 20% in leading positions (statistic from the engineers association). Women's sharing part of resources are not exactly as big as men's, because there are more men in leading positions and with higher salaries than there are women but the Reality is that women's participation in water management have shown a big difference in approach to water problems. A more holistic view with a very important environmental approach has been developed during the past ten years. Several alternatives processes of water treatments, with more environmental and socio economic theoretical bases were developed during the last years. It will be necessary to study the correlation between these two aspects (gender and changing the direction of water management) to definitely prove it scientifically, but a first empiric approach shows that it is the fact.

The probability of accepting this thesis is higher when a comparative study with the energy sector is made. In energy sector the situation is more homogeny; men are represented in large more numbers than women, who are employed as administrators and not as technicians. The sector is still specific infrastructural and quite technocratic and it could be a consequence of a traditional manly male organisation. It has to be corroborated in the future.

Womens managing of water issues is important as women's rights and even as a possibility to develop water management in new more universal way.