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Under the Northern Lights, The Reflection of Gender on the Career of Women Managers in Finnish municipalities.

"A diamond is a girl's best friend" is a well-known saying. However, as our recently elected female president Tarja Halonen has stated on many previous occasions "it is, in fact, the Nordic welfare society which is a girl's best friend".

When I interviewed 26 woman municipal managers in 1996 they emphasised the importance of a welfare society for all the residents of their municipalities, not only for women but equally so for men. According to them, the practice of a welfare society can be seen at the municipal level through those services which the municipalities offer their residents, for example, day-care, old

people care, education and health care. These are the services which women took care of, firstly as volunteers in their homes and later as employees on the lower level of the municipal hierarchies. Women managers clearly saw that the municipalities should be for their residents, creating equality between people, between women and men, between old and young, and between rich and poor. This also means that our welfare society, based on social services, can provide opportunities for women to work outside the home. It means that women here in Finland can combine their career and their family life, as most of the

interviewed female municipal managers have done in reality. Now, it has even been proved that a woman can achieve the highest political position in Finland, that of President, by successfully combining her educational, work, political and family duties.

During the presidential election campaign there was some discussion over the still existing differences between Left and Right ideologies concerning equality. My study will also contribute to this discussion. It might be said that the bourgeois ideology of equality is based more on individualism than other ideologies. The leftist ideologies of equality are more predominantly based on social values.

The question is how do we understand equal rights and the responsibilities of human beings as the members of society. In my in-depth interviews, women based in municipalities where the power of the politician is in the hands of the Centre Party or the National Coalition saw that equality has mainly been achieved through individualistic ways. Women based in municipalities where the political majority is in the hands of the Social Democratic Party, demanded more social responsibility through the influence of legislation and other actions by which they saw that real equality will be achieved. However, we need to remember that women themselves handle gender issues according to the methods that are available for use. We can confirm that Finland is a Nordic Country where the legislation on equality and services which creates equality between the sexes in all areas of life are well developed. These facts, however, cannot guarantee equality for women in their career progress or at work as managers.

In the 1970s, when the first woman reached the position of a municipal manager, economic growth was high. In the 1990s, Finland's economy collapsed, bankruptcy was common and high unemployment was also an everyday issue. Now, the situation is a little bit better. In addition, the economy has been totally globalised. This has led more to an individualistic understanding of equality. However, as has been discussed very recently, we do not need to forget the dreams of justice, equality and sisterhood. In this sense, equality will be a basic ideal, if we want to live in a peaceful, tolerant and understanding society.

The question is whether the politicians of the municipalities have or have not promoted equality between women and men at the highest level of municipal management. We have some evidence

regarding this through statistics. In 1996, only 6,6 percent of municipal managers were women. The situation is still nearly the same, only 7,5 percent of municipal managers are women. Municipal work life is still gender segregated both on a horizontal and vertical level. In addition, nowadays, communitarian values are being discussed and have been connected to the term 'active citizenship' and 'managerialism'. Some communitarianists are criticising welfare services and demanding more individual responsibilities based on family values. Some others still trust the modified welfare model. One needs to ask whether communitarian can also be a mark of neoconservatism. This might include some "backlash" elements which would pursue women back to their homes.

In this situation, we need to ask who then is the person or group creating equality between sexes in top municipal jobs? Could it be a woman leader? Could it be a council? At least municipal politicians as well as municipal managers are in key positions to promote justice and equality between sexes at work. However, there are also opinions that in the Finnish working life equality between sexes has been reached. If this is so, why do we have so few women at the top? This is a confusing contradiction, which leads to the idea that equality is not the same for men and for women? Could it be so, as the Executive Director, of The Regional Council of North Carelia, Tarja Cronberg, recently wrote in a local newspaper, that if a woman wants to progress her career to the top she is labelled as being a pushy but at the same time this behaviour is acceptable for men. This phenomenon arose in my in-depth interviews. Women are often examined according to their gender through a magnifying glass, when they are applying for managerial work or when they are working as municipal managers.

One of my interviewees said to me: "Equality starts with the heart of the human being". I will underline this aspect. The humanity of a human being starts to be developed from childhood via education, work and life experiences. When parents are bringing up their children, they create models to understand equality. When schooling starts, teachers create, by their behaviour, models of equality. At work, it is the managers who create equality or inequality at work. In the municipal political life, the behaviour and the work of the politicians create models of equality or inequality, as does the municipal manager.

In my thesis, I have tried to see whether a woman as a manager can be an agent for changing the working life for creating a better work environment for both sexes and even for creating more economic and effective outcomes through different, perhaps feminine ways of leadership. For this purpose, I have used three gendered typologies; feminine, masculine and androgynous. I evaluated the women's work, careers, childhoods and political lives by these typologies. In short, the feminine, as an ideal typology, means the use of the sensitivity, feelings, care, discussion, body language and low hierarchical structures at work and in family life. Women are, then, emotional and visual figures at work. Masculine, as a typology in this thesis, means the use of command and control, hierarchical structures, ordering and punishment at work and in the family life. Androgynous, as a typology, means the combination of the feminine and masculine typologies. These typologies, of course, are theoretical and can be used by a person in a different time, in different connections in different ways. Even so, these gendered typologies showed me how the issue of gender is present in the workplace of municipal managers. In this way, my results support the collective findings of Heam and Rantalaiho, working life is gendered and sex, gender and sexuality are always present at work and in family life. This is why we need gendered theoretical frameworks for analysing political-administrational leadership in the municipalities. We need to provide links between gender, culture, power of economics and politics.

By reading, for example, a recent interview of Niiniluoto in one municipal magazine, we can notice that the effective and economic work of the municipalities will be advanced better if equality at work has been achieved. In addition, the welfare of staff at work grows hand in hand with equality. I will ask how a leading style of management can affect the promotion of equality between the sexes at work? According to my research and the international leadership literature the most suitable leadership style for work today is feminine or androgynous. This entails discussions, co-operating without any hierarchical boundaries, understanding body language and feelings and respecting multiplicity. Without any doubt, bureaucratic behaviour in organisational life is "water under the bridge" or as we Finns say "the snow of the earlier winter". The human being needs a work place, where s/he is accepted and

respected. A pleasant and tolerate atmosphere at work creates opportunities to produce better results with less money.

Today, working life is very complicated. Day by day we will face, even here in North Karelia, increasingly more races, religions, cultures and styles which reflect at work. The manager is, then, in a new situation. She needs to have an ability to lead more and more complex networking and to run a work environment which entails multiplicity. She needs to have an ability to work in a multicultural environment. She needs to be a spiritual leader. All this means that working life today demands different kinds of leadership than that of twenty years ago. A manager, of course, needs to be professional in her duties, but this is not enough, a manager also needs to create a working environment where differences and diversity are acceptable, where feelings belongs to life and where the totality of life has been understood. Women, according to my evaluations, as well as according to the international literature, are just those who have learnt, in their traditional responsibilities as mothers, wives, sisters and aunts, to understand the feelings of others without words, in silent messages. Women managers with their femininity are now being asked to lead according to the ideologies of managerialism. This entails the latest theories of leadership. Of course, some people expect that women are "good lads", but this does not work, masculinity is not the self-evidently appreciated method for leadership today, though it has been kept as the norm of working life for centuries. Women as managers need to be genuine, to be themselves, to celebrate femininity.

I argue here that globalisation will change the character of leadership in all Finnish municipalities. In this present situation, we need to take more seriously than earlier the questions of gender, justice and equality for women in top management. I conclude in my thesis that we need to open up the hidden gender question attached to working life, because gender is an important dimension at work. We can no longer close our eyes to the questions of gender, sex and sexuality and equality in municipal work. My basic argument is that to attain equality, women need to have the same rights and opportunities to gain the top positions in municipal management as men have, in accordance with the demands of the European Union.