

*Anna Pokorska*

Nicolaus Copernicus University in Toruń

# ***Gender gap* in university authorities: Cultural masculinisation of institutions as a barrier to women’s access to managerial positions**

## **Introduction**

For the last thirty years, we observe constant yet poorly coordinated changes in Poland’s higher education. The changes result from national demographic, along with social and economic determinants. Moreover, the changes result from the impact of external factors [Antonowicz 2015, Wnuk-Lipińska 1996]. First, the public policy towards higher education institutions – especially typical universities<sup>1</sup> – focuses on the problem of institutional effectiveness and related science funding regulations, Polish universities’ participation in global competition, along with legal and institutional infrastructure and organisational culture adequate to new challenges [Jablecka 2002, Kwiek 2010]. The direction of reforms in Polish science led to multiple fundamental changes in staff recruitment mechanisms (open competitions) research funding mechanisms (grant system and institutional evaluation), student education (courses accreditation), and academic career, i.e. the gradual abandonment of hierarchy in favour of scientific results. We notice changes in almost every sphere of universities’ functioning, but in one of those spheres changes occur unusually slow, by which I mean the management structure analysed from the viewpoint of women and men in managerial positions.

This article’s goal involves the identification of barriers that limit women’s access to the highest managerial positions at universities. In particular, I will elaborate the institutional barriers, according to both the subject literature and results of quali-

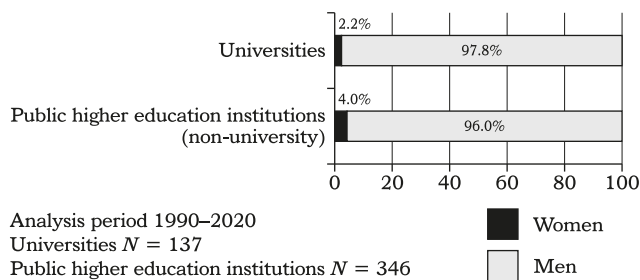
tative research that involved seventeen women: female rectors and vice-rectors of the 2016–2020 term of office.

## **Gender gap in universities’ management structure**

Understood as ‘a gap due to gender ... that refers to systematically observable differences in statistics regarding the achievements of individuals of different gender’ [Siemieńska 2009:313], the gender gap phenomenon is especially visible at universities; both in scientific and management careers<sup>2</sup>. We may characterise women’s access to managerial positions in higher education as hampered all around the world. According to the Times Higher Education (THE) ranking, women currently lead only thirty-nine higher education institutions out of the first two hundred included in the set [THE 2020]. When it comes to data for Poland, in 1990–2020, women held only three terms of office as rectors at public universities. In the case of public non-university higher education institutions (HEIs)<sup>3</sup>, women also held few terms of office but, on the other hand, the number was greater by eleven terms of office in comparison to university HEIs (Figure 1). Hence, when we compare the above data, it appears that a glass ceiling is especially present in public universities.

The elections for the 2020–2024 term of office slightly changed the proportions of women and men employed as rectors at universities. Eight years

**Figure 1.** The percentage of terms of office as rectors by gender (1990–2020)



Source: own elaboration.

after a woman held a term of office as a rector<sup>4</sup>, women became rectors in another two public universities and five remaining HEIs. In comparison to 1990–2020, this means a significant change in the number of women in universities' administration. To answer the question of why exactly the elections for the 2020–2024 term of office proved to be a breakthrough, we require additional analyses and exceeds the scope of this article. However, let us note that although the number of women who are rectors slightly increased after the 2020 election, the general image of women's participation in universities' authorities in 1990–2024 does not change significantly. We may still characterise the gender gap as very distinct.

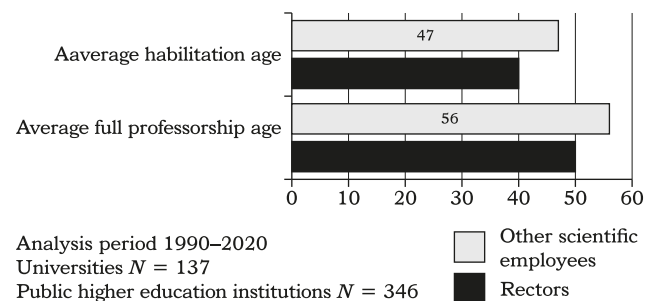
The scale of the gender gap in university management structure becomes even more pronounced when we compare the percentage of women that hold the highest positions at universities with the percentage of women that hold the highest positions in business. In Poland, women made 16% of presidents, members of boards of directors, and CEOs in 2019, whereas the percentage rose to 19% in 2020 [Grant Thornton 2020]. Even though we cannot characterise the above as an impressive gender equality index, it still appears as a great achievement in comparison to universities.

## University rectors profile

We may interpret the election of two female rectors for the 2020–2024 term of office both as an accidental deviation from the previous norm or as a symptom of changes, but it certainly is no rejection of the previous status quo. As statistical research reveals<sup>5</sup>, the university rector profile in Poland remains unchanged for over thirty years. It is a man over 55 years old with above-average scientific

achievements, meaning a man who obtained both a habilitation and full professorship earlier than other academics (Figure 2). Therefore, those individuals become rectors who are *primus inter pares*, who have the appropriate authority – especially scientific authority – confirmed by formal degrees and titles. Therefore, rectors customarily and most frequently are professors.

**Figure 2.** The average age at which the studied male/female rectors of Polish multidisciplinary universities obtained an academic degree



Source: own elaboration and Achmatowicz 2011, pp. 5–26.

## Barriers in women's management carrier: literature review

Why men obtain a professor's degree more frequently than women, later to become informal leaders, then candidates for the rector's position, and lastly become rectors? We may explain this with categories universal for the equality phenomenon, which includes social and psychological determinants. First, studies on gender inequality show that the prevalence of men in high-ranking positions may be due to gender stereotypes [Środa 2012; Collinson and Hearn 1996]. Second, the studies show that the prevalence of men in high-ranking positions results from different socialisation experiences of women and men, which direct them towards leadership or subordinate roles [Scott 2018; Środa 2012]. Finally, the studies show that the prevalence of men in high-ranking positions results from the collective expectation that a leader usually means a man [Eagly and Karau 2002; Kanter 1975]. Researchers write about a 'think leader, think male' syndrome. We may characterise the syndrome's nature as global and especially strong among men themselves [Schein et al. 1996]. The syndrome's symptoms include the association of leader qualities

with those stereotypically associated with men, such as goal-orientation, autonomy, domination, analytical and abstract thinking, the ability to separate the personal and emotional from what is necessary to achieve a goal [Collinson and Hearn 1996; Hoobler, Lemmon, and Wayne 2011]. Therefore, the assessment of women's suitability for leadership roles involves a bias and originates from the stereotypical belief that women are unsuitable for leadership roles [Billing and Alvesson 2007]. As Evans [2011:62] writes: 'Men are still viewed as "default leaders" and women as "atypical leaders," with the perception that they violate accepted norms of leadership, no matter what the leadership behavior.' The perception of women as atypical leaders or denying them leadership qualities is not without influence on how women perceive themselves. Soo Min Toh and Geoffrey Leonardelli [2013] show that preference for men as leaders makes women not apply for managerial positions, as they fear that others will not accept them in such a role. Women who do not feel accepted as leaders do not use this category to describe themselves. Without adequate self-categorisation, individuals may consciously abandon leadership roles or behave in a way that does not encourage the recognition of their leadership competence [Min Toh, Leonardelli 2013:191–192]. Together with the lack of leadership models based on femininity, this process creates invisible barriers for women who aspire to leadership roles [Hannum et al. 2014].

Feminist-oriented research also provides knowledge on the reasons for the different status of men and women in organisations and unequal access to highest-ranking positions. Acker perceives the problem as a derivative of 'gendered institutions,' which means that gender exists in processes, practices, depictions, ideologies, and the distribution of power in different sectors of social life [Acker 1992:567]. In this context, we do not understand gender only as a characteristic of a given person but, first of all, as a process that is an integral part of other processes, which e.g. constitute a given social institution. Therefore, institutionalisation often follows gender divisions. This applies also to universities, which may be called institutions historically rooted in masculinity because it is men who created and dominated them for centuries (Acker 1992:567)<sup>6</sup>. If we take the number of male and female professors into consideration, the above remains true even today, despite the feminisation of universities at graduate and postgraduate levels<sup>7</sup>. Moreover, Acker believes that people symbolically interpret key social

institutions – including universities – from the male viewpoint because it is men who hold the main leadership positions. Therefore, the absence of women defines institutions, and the absence of women results from processes that consolidate practices related to the dominant gender [Acker 1992:567]. In the context of these processes, scholars mention the use of symbols, depictions, and ideologies that legitimise the hegemony of masculinity to maintain the legitimacy and usefulness of institutions [Acker 1992; Connell 1987]. Moreover, scholars mention the creation of a gender neutrality illusion when in reality a specific gender determines and structures an institution [Acker 1992:568]. We clearly see this mechanism in every organisation in the form of a hypothetical 'disembodied worker,' defined by the requirements of the assigned workstation, detached from other, non-professional obligations. Therefore, too many duties unrelated to the performed work may make a worker unsuitable for a position [Acker 1990:149]. As a person whom most culturally assign the role of an individual focused primarily on professional work, a man becomes the closest thing to the model of such an employee, while women look after the personal needs of men and care for children.

Therefore, Acker argues that there is a gender-based division of responsibilities behind every 'job' and 'position,' even if they remain gender-neutral concepts in the institutional narrative. In practice, those with fewer non-professional duties are naturally more suited to positions that involve responsibility and power, whereas those that must balance work and family life are to work at lower levels of the organisational hierarchy [Acker 1990:149–150].

The theory of gendered institutions provides us with interpretative frames that prove useful to understand the institutional barriers that women experience when they pursue their careers in universities' management structures. Even though we may speak of a universal – or sociopsychological – nature of some barriers, what reinforces the remaining barriers are the academic and collegial tradition, along with the completely masculine culture of the university. In their work on the complexity of HEIs, Bergquist and Pawlak [2008] prove that collegial culture complies with values and perspectives that are strongly men-oriented. In the context of strongly men-oriented values and perspectives, Bergquist and Pawlak emphasise competition and the pursuit of prestige and domination [Bergquist and Pawlak 2008:33]. The above manifests itself in the well-established custom that involves the election of

academic leaders from among the professors, which confirms the prestige that results from research and publications [Deem 2003; Sahlin and Eriksson-Zetterquist 2016]. Although PhDs can become rectors since 18 March 2011 – thanks to the amendment of the law on higher education and science (Higher Education Act of July 27, 2005, Journal of Laws of the Republic of Poland from 2005, No. 164, item 1365) – habilitation still remains an actual pass to managerial positions. Many researchers describe the relatively restrictive attachment to this custom as an important barrier to the development of women's careers. Existing studies leave no doubt that women are less likely to obtain the rank/position of a professor than men. Therefore, women have a relatively lower chance to enter the group that includes the future rectors and vice-rectors [Carvalho and Santiago 2008; Carvahlo and Diogo 2018; Hoo- bler, Lemmon, and Wayne 2011; Uhly, Visser, and Zippel 2017; Wolfinger, Mason, and Goulden 2008; Rodzik 2016]. According to Statistics Poland data, in 2018, 940 women and 954 men obtained a habilitation in Poland. In the same year, 182 women and 299 men obtained professorship [GUS 2019]. Degree obtainment statistics show that the higher the level of a scientific career, the fewer women are present, which follows the 'leaky pipeline principle' [Berryman 1983]. Moreover, the informal association of a scientific career with a management career means almost twice as few women in the pool of people considered for the position of a rector. Even though the pool appears to be open, academic traditions limit it to people with the right profile inscribed in the university's customs, norms, and values.

The academic tradition not only subtly and informally excludes individuals without professorship from the competition for the position of a rector but also prevents the election of a male/female rector in ways other than democratic elections. The idea of collegiality lies in the center of academic tradition. The idea assumes that management and decision-making should be based on mechanisms similar to the conduct of academic discussion, which involves a clash of views and stances, criticism, the verification of presented arguments, and the presentation of own arguments. It is crucial to gain support in the academic community, which in the case of leaders like rectors and vice-rectors<sup>8</sup> leads to a formal victory in democratic elections. Moreover, when one wins the democratic elections she gains the ability to decide on behalf of others [Sahlin and Eriksson-Zetterquist 2016]. Members of the academic com-

munity perceive gaining trust and recognition [Pokorska 2019] in the community<sup>9</sup> as more important than universal leadership competence; also in the sense that the person who wants to become a leader will represent the community by following the university's vision, which the academics accepted through elections. According to the gathered empirical data [Pokorska 2019], the typical leader's characteristics are, in fact, secondary in universities. The main requirement in the archetype of the university's leader involves the individual's compliance with the collegial culture of the university [Pokorska 2019] because when she becomes a rector, it means that she becomes a university's symbol and guarantor of the university's values, norms, and principles, which stem from the particular university's history.

The above is all the more important because tradition and collegiality form the basis of a university's identity. Customs form an inseparable element of image and communication and the axis of an academic community. Universities emphasise the above fact even in their statutes. For example, the first point of Jagiellonian University's statute states: 'The Jagiellonian University ... is a self-governed higher education institution that follows the Higher Education Act, the Statute, and customs derived from its tradition' [Statute of the Jagiellonian University 2019]. Given that academic culture and its habits have a male gender, the 'think leader, think male' syndrome becomes even more literal in the university context. Social barriers intersect with barriers that the institution created and with its (hidden) genderisation.

## **Barriers to women's management careers at universities**

The goal of the qualitative research conducted in 2018 involved an attempt to answer the question of how strong are the institutional barriers to women's promotion in the Polish academic society<sup>10</sup>. Fifteen female vice-rectors of multidisciplinary universities and two female ex-rectors participated in the study. The study involved individual in-depth face-to-face interviews that lasted from one to two hours. The study's goal dealt with the reconstruction of each woman's career trajectory and the attempt to understand women's perceptions in vice-rectorial positions. Moreover, the latter issue dealt with the question of why the position of a vice-rector typically means the women's last stage of career in the

university's management structure. The interviews' form was only partly structured, which allowed the interviewees to freely provide information that they deemed important. Due to the above nature of the interviews, I analysed the issue of those gender barriers that spontaneously and repeatedly appeared in the women's statements both explicitly – as a part of their own experience – and implicitly, as a characterisation of the professional environment. In the conducted analysis, I also used the official documents published by the universities, seeking to more precisely define the level and manner in which occurs the process of university's genderisation/masculinisation.

## Results

The analysis of the research results shows that the experience of barriers that hinder managerial career's development has two dimensions: the first one is well conceptualised and easily reconstructed in personal statements as it refers to the socio-psychological sphere, the second one is difficult to grasp, ambiguous, related to what women call the 'character of the academic milieu.'

References to the period of motherhood and the lack of systemic solutions dominate the issue of possible barriers to career development in research participants' freely expressed statements. By systemic solutions, I mean such that would help women mix family and work life. Specialists perceive the inability to combine these spheres as a universal problem that concerns women in all sectors of the economy and at different career levels. Moreover, the problem is no less severe for female scientists.

*No one has ever told me that I am unsuitable for the job because I am a woman. No, I have never experienced anything like that. However, ... there are limitations, there are 24 hours in each day, a man will not give birth, feed, and fully raise a child. So ... even today, given a fair division of responsibilities at home, many duties remain with the woman.*

To well-conceptualised and apparent barriers also belong issues concerning gender socialisation, understood as personality formation in the direction of ambitions' subordination to family matters or a professional path that will not disturb home functioning. In adult life, the issues result in the lack of agency and self-confidence, and less courage to accept new challenges, a situation in which a woman becomes focused on supporting her husband's career or ac-

cepts full responsibility for household duties under pressure from the beliefs and expectations adopted by family members.

*When I compare myself with my colleagues, I believe that when men get promoted, it usually results in a situation, in which a woman assumes full responsibility for household duties and becomes committed to the man, and he becomes the one who gets promoted. As for my promotions ... they could not result in any kind of harm to my family. I had to arrange everything so that I could fulfil both kinds of duties. ... Certainly, this is also a basic difficulty.*

The first type of barriers also includes the awareness of different stereotypes related to sociocultural gender and different standards for women's and men's functioning in the society. The interviewees often mentioned that the culturally fixed image of women, on the one hand, as emotional, relationship-oriented, avoiding strategy, and evading politics, while on the other hand, as focused on detail and tedious work. This image often negatively affects the chances of women's inclusion in management structures – due to the non-merit-based evaluation of their competences – or determines to which roles will they be assigned. Therefore, women more often work as vice-rectors for student affairs and finance than as vice-rectors for foreign affairs and science, which in the university's context means that women more often perform executive than representative functions.

*A woman must always be three times better prepared than men because she is evaluated differently; I was no exception, I could not improvise in any situation.*

*If a woman clearly defends her claim, engages in an argument, even when the argument is the most factual one, she will either hear that she is aggressive, emotional, or ridiculous.*

The recognition of the above sociocultural barriers probably results from their presence in the public debate, but also from the fact that they are the subject of discussion among women themselves, in various contexts of professional and social life.

*For the second time, I returned from a conference of European female rectors ... we talk about problems, connected precisely with the female leaders' functioning in science ... frankly, all these problems*

*that female vice-rectors face at EU universities share many similarities: they involve the asymmetry of professional and family life, the unequal allocation of funds for research, unconscious prejudices against female managers.*

Sociopsychological barriers are defined, well realised, and become a field of implementation of various personal strategies for overcoming them. Stories about career trajectories of the interviewed women vice-rectors and rectors show that although each one of them experienced or experiences at least one of the described barriers, each one of them also established a strategy to neutralise the barrier. Therefore, the women describe the barriers as a painful yet already solved problem, often in an anecdotal manner or as a difficulty that women who aspire to managerial positions must face. However, most often perceive such types of barriers as an integral part of everyday life, believing that how one deals with such barriers depends more on personal characteristics, the ability to work on one's attitude, reactions, and patterns of interpersonal interaction, than on concrete systemic solutions.

*Usually, when we want to be discriminated, we get discriminated. You require self-development to learn how to not be discriminated. However, it does not always work out.*

Therefore, the choice of who succeeds in the creation of effective strategies and – as a result – will have better chances to succeed in the pursuit of a professional career is a matter of contingency and unpredictability, which is difficult to deal with. In this sense, when a woman acts as a vice-rector – which is often seen as groundbreaking<sup>11</sup> – others do not see it as ‘clearing the way for other women’ and initiate change but rather as an example of ‘it is possible.’ We observe the domination of an assumption that one cannot change a university, an institution regulated by history, tradition, and customs, through ways that do not inscribe in its ways, e.g. by the implementation of quotas, even in the mild form of a recommendation. Even if the interviewees presented this as a desirable solution, the academic society would not accept it in a situation in which so few women can formulate individual anti-discriminatory strategies.

The prerequisites to access managerial positions involve not just the ability to overcome sociopsychological barriers. Academics perceive the small

percentage of women in such positions as the university's specificity as an institution, yet it remains unspecified and unconceptualised in the interviewees' statements.

*These are some unconscious barriers ..., I don't know, possibly related to the ability to withstand the fact that the election of authorities at universities looks this way; it is hard to describe, but there is something else apart from character traits and family burdens ... but it is somewhat hidden, this university's specificity.*

However, the research results show that the ability to sense that character and act accordingly to it is crucial to gain access to managerial positions. As we filter the women's stories through Acker's theory, we may state that the specificity results from institutional practices that petrify the gendered management culture based on academic tradition and collegiality.

To become a manager, especially a rector, one must pursue a ‘disembodied worker’ model, which is a direct derivative of sociocultural barriers. The ‘disembodied worker’ model involves a high level of availability, the ability to separate oneself from household duties, and the ability to focus on work at any moment.

*The position of a rector requires a lot of time and a great deal of dedication to run the organisation ... participate in meetings .... You must go from place to place and meet all those people, who manage those institutions, I mean the departments, plus the directors, plus the representative duties, by which I mean hosting guests, ambassadors, professors from abroad .... Moreover, there is the external surroundings issue, by which I mean meetings with businessmen, the city, the region. ... And, besides, our ministry and other universities. Therefore, to become a rector you must have time, so you must sacrifice family time. As a result, you can do this when your children are already brought up and do not require your time. Because that is like working in several jobs at the same time. The representative duties also mean that you will be busy on weekends. Polish National Flag Day, Polish Armed Forces Day, All Saints' Day, all of them require the rector's presence at different kinds of assemblies. By the presence, I do not mean some fifteen minutes but rather a couple of hours. Therefore, the rector's schedule is very tight.*

Availability is also important for vice-rectors, even though the function allows for more freedom. However, the university's collegial culture revolves around gaining authority and support through active participation in discussions, which precludes vice-rectors abstaining from participation in the meetings. Participation and 'showing up' is crucial to gain the trust of the academic community and the proper recognition [Pokorska 2019]. Even when meetings are not obligatory, participation in meetings is essential to pursue a career. The representative aspect of the vice-rector's role is its important, inseparable, and inscribed element.

*I did jobs that others did not want, but that would not be enough. I just take the floor.*

*You must always find somebody who will offer you that. When they do not know you, nobody will offer ... if I did not socialise and if no person would tell me to go here and there, I would never go. It does not work like that: you cannot offer yourself. It is often impossible. You must let them know you. And to let them know you, you must be in the right place at the right time.*

Regular participation in both formal and informal meetings is more difficult for women for several reasons. The meetings happen at different times of day and differ in nature. The most basic difficulty that women face deals with the burden of household duties.

*We are at a meeting of rectors and the meeting ends, everybody goes home. And my colleagues ask me: 'What will you do when you got home?' So I tell them that first I will check whether the washing machine is set up, whether someone did the shopping, what is in the fridge, what do I have to cook, what did the son do, etc. 'Are you kidding? When I come back, I am going to go to bed. My wife will make me a coffee. What do you do when you get up in the morning?' So, I tell them that I make myself coffee and breakfast for my children. 'Nah, my T-shirts wait for me, they are ironed, everything is prepared.'*

Meetings as the main pattern of professional contacts also have the feature that they are the basic way to gain recognition, i.e. social capital, and make key decisions. If you attend a meeting, others may assign you a particular position or allow you to promote your own candidate. One's presence during a spe-

cific assembly is often more important than one's competences. The cultural importance of meetings sustains hegemonic masculinity, which becomes an exclusive social network that limits access to valuable formal and informal contacts and information [Husu 2004]. Therefore, the barriers include not only availability to attend a meeting – especially an informal one – but also the possibility to receive an invitation. Moreover, attendance is a prerequisite, however far insufficient to build social capital. One must follow the culturally accepted model of behavior, emotions, and statement formulation. According to women's statements, the model's creators constructed the model with masculinity in mind. The closer one's natural or learned way of behavior to this scheme, the greater the sense of acceptance, influence, and full participation.

*I speak differently during huge assemblies than do in direct conversations. During the former, I speak very briefly and to the point. This way I become indispensable.*

*Some men even tell me that I am almost like a man, so it was always easy for me to find myself in this academia.*

*I think that some of my personality traits are typically masculin. I do not like to complain, I do not like that kind of twitter typical of women, when they complain that something is too sweet, or speak about children and medical conditions ... Logical minds perform better in the academia, irrespective of gender. The issue lies in abstractive, rational, concrete thinking. Universities led by individuals who think that way prosper better.*

*The worst thing to do is to be uncertain. 'I am afraid, I am this, but I am not that.' You just must be a partner. And then it is all right.*

Irrespectively of how women behave in private, to gain authority, prestige, and become successful at the university, they must refer to typically masculine symbolic. At the same time, the typically female behaviour is sometimes infantilised and described as full of indecisiveness, shyness, and submissiveness. The lack of alternatives for the masculine behavioural pattern results in a situation in which the masculine pattern becomes the only acceptable one, especially in the context of power struggle. The interviewees most often conceptualise rectorial elections in such categories. When someone wants to become a vice-rector, the whole complicated process involves gaining trust and recognition with particular com-

petences [Pokorska 2019]. Finally, the process culminates when the university's oligarchy chooses the particular candidate [Clark 1977]. When someone wants to become a candidate for a rector and later participate in the elections, she must prove that her professional profile and the presented vision of the university culturally matches the values that the academia awards. Leadership competences are not as exposed in this context as the level of prestige, which proves that an individual can compete, and the scale of recognition in the environment expressed by external and internal stakeholders of the university.

*Moderator: What does one must do to become a rector?*

*Female respondent: You must have scientific achievements. The rectorial elections are a competition about one's scientific achievements, how one is perceived in Poland, including the scientific community. Personality is also considered.*

*Being a full professor appointed by the President of Poland surely reinforces one's authority and confirms competence, like a certificate. Just as there are certificates that confirm linguistic abilities, we have certificates that confirm that you are a suitable candidate. A professor has a bigger authority than a PhD.*

The vice-rector function legitimises leadership competences, and they often require no long list of successes: it suffices to categorise one as a guarantor of university customs and traditions. Leadership competences become a background of features that are key to sustain the university's collegial culture, scientific prestige, recognition in the broadly understood academic milieu, availability, and active participation in meetings and debates. The meetings and debates mean an opportunity to present one's concepts and arguments, and to convince others that the arguments are valid. Moreover, the meetings mean an opportunity to build behind-the-scenes networks of support and mobilise supporters, also through actions typical for a purely political game. The actions involve the ability to select the future team of vice-rectors so that it would translate into the accumulation of support during the voting stage, but also the ability to expose the opponent's weaknesses. The process is deeply rooted in collegiality and aimed at culturally understood masculinity, i.e. aggression, rivalry. The aim of the process involves the achievement of the highest rank and the maximisation of individual prestige.

*You must know how to walk, convince, promise, propose positions. I am more pro-competences. You must also be motivated in this context and have this desire to strut your stuff, to be important, to gain an appropriate rank.*

*Sometimes it results in a very tough fight, people search for some nonsense or things from the past, or try to ascribe one to a political party so that they could eventually say: that is not a suitable candidate. What decides here is politics, not competences.*

Women are often unfamiliar with this model of competition. The key elements of their vision of competition involve the assumption that competences and the ability to convince others that you will prove a useful member of the organisation. However, a gendered/masculinised university rejects such statements as they imply an inversion of the meaning of the rector's function. The selection process focused on substantive competences deprives the rector's position of what it represents. The function then becomes more utilitarian than representative: such view of the rector's function primarily involves management and is tightly connected with accountability for the plans, actions taken, and results achieved.

*It is not the university's purpose to give the rector a degree, position, and boost his or her confidence: it is the rector's duty to serve the university. She must always be there for the staff. And the nature of the rector's behavior must involve partnership, not "I am god." What is important at the university is to say: I am the one who is important here.*

As a result, the academics also reject the possibility to elect the rector in a competition<sup>12</sup>, which scholars associate with the corporate model, based on impersonal competences' evaluation. Nevertheless, scholars compare the election process to a competition, except that the former is based on the evaluation of scientific achievements and the academic environment's reception. We should note that some universities specify in their statutes that 'only an individual who holds the title of a professor can become a rector,' despite the legal act that allows the persons with Ph.D. to become rectors.

*Statute's regulations limit the career path to a decision-making position. In theory, a Ph.D. can become a director of a department or a dean, but that is only in theory because our statute in this respect*



*always introduced and maintained higher criteria. So to this moment, somebody could become a manager of something only after habilitation. Such traditional promotion rules must be followed.*

Such entries create different informal barriers to women: the barriers result from both the statistics of unequal populations of women and men that hold a degree or work as professors and from a linguistic standpoint – in the symbolic sphere, the entries refer to men – which underlines the university's male gender. Although women see that such formalised rules limit their chances, the rules appear so formalised and deeply connected to the university's dignity that the academics interpret any departure from them as an attack on the academic tradition and thus the university's vision. The above situation exists despite the academic institutions' transformation and the emergence of new challenges. The traditional rules of promotion seem to constitute the university's identity. Moreover, the rules seem so obvious that their gender becomes invisible, which is similar to the exclusion of a large part of the academic community from having an actual impact on the functioning of the institutional structure and scientific system's strategy.

## Summary

The conducted research shows that a university is an institution, in which the domination of sociocultural masculinity is the main source of institutional barriers. This appears to almost perfectly inscribe into Joan Acker's earlier findings. The academics do not seem to notice the barriers and are often unaware of them because they perceive the barriers as an immanent part of the university's tradition. On the one hand, the tradition means the axis of the university's identity, while on the other hand, the tradition reinforces the 'institution's character,' its cultural masculinisation.

Cultural masculinisation is visible in the disembodied model of a university 'worker,' the preferred patterns of behavior, and professional interactions, but also how academics elect their leaders, especially rectors. The model's axis to a greater extent means gaining authority that results from the recognition in the milieu and the recognition of scientific achievements than the authority that results from experience in administration and management functions. Therefore, the process of becoming an academic

leader deals more with whether one respects existing values and norms of the university's collegial culture than whether one proves that she efficiently plans and pursues specific goals related to the organisation's development. The latter approach forms the basis for how the studied women categorised themselves as leaders. The cultural incompatibility of this self-categorisation concerning how others shape the academic leader's image reinforces the status quo in the distribution of managerial functions by gender.

<sup>1</sup> By university, I mean an institution defined in the Poland's Higher Education Act of July 20, 2018. According to the Act, a university means a multidisciplinary higher education institution. In the article, I refer only to public universities.

<sup>2</sup> The participation of women at different levels of scientific career also means the area of high gender disparity in higher education. However, due to the article's subject, I refer to this issue only to the extent directly related to women's management careers.

<sup>3</sup> In the article, by an academic institution (non-university), I mean a type of HEI mentioned by the Higher Education Act of July 20, 2018. Therefore, such institutions belong to the list of public HEIs supervised by the Minister of National Education.

<sup>4</sup> In 2008–2012, women were rectors of two universities: the University of Warsaw and the University of Opole.

<sup>5</sup> I mean the research conducted by me at the Department of Science and Higher Education Research, Nicolaus Copernicus University in Toruń.

<sup>6</sup> The universities gradually started to allow women from the 1870s, but the full recognition and inclusion of women as students and researchers did not happen until after the First World War [Suchmiel 2004; Dadej 2018; Jasińska 2014; Jasińska 2015].

<sup>7</sup> In the 2017/2018 academic term, women amounted to 58% of all students. The percentage of women among the postgraduate students amounted to 55% percent [GUS 2019:17, 25].

<sup>8</sup> In Poland, the electoral college ceased to elect vice-rectors only in 2018. The rector appoints and recalls vice-rectors. Despite that some universities also require the recommendation of collegial bodies.

<sup>9</sup> According to the conducted research, trust and recognition mean important elements of professional position building, which leads to assuming the position of a rector or vice-rector. For a detailed analysis of women's careers in universities' management structures, see: Pokorska 2019.

<sup>10</sup> The Faculty of Humanities of Nicolaus Copernicus University in Toruń funded the research as part of the competition for research grants for young scientists, announced on April 24, 2018 (grant number 1065-H; for detailed research results, see: Pokorska 2019).

- <sup>11</sup> For example, for over one hundred years, until 2016, there were only two female vice-rectors at Adam Mickiewicz University; in 2016, two new vice-rectors were elected.
- <sup>12</sup> In 2011, there was an amendment to the Higher Education Act that allowed for the election of a rector in a competitive procedure (Article 72, item 1); no university decided to use this option, some of them decided to exclude the possibility of competitive procedure election in their statutes.

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