GENDER, LABOUR MARKET AND THE EDUCATION. A COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVE BETWEEN SWEDEN AND ROMANIA

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Motto: “A woman is like a teabag. You never know her strength until you drop her in hot water”
Eleanor Roosevelt.

Introduction

Short introductive framework

Women’s situation and position in the society has been in detail nationally and internationally discussed during the last decades. Even if, when it comes to the European women, one could say their rights are highly respected as compared to the African or Arab women for example, they also confront sharp problems. In many European countries, they live a growing and powerful daily insecurity, with unpredictability in their unilateral labour contracts and mechanisms of retention, promotion, remuneration, and working time. “In the face of such mechanisms, often the only option for defense, claim or resistance is to quit. To a great extent, these options explain their labour trajectories, marked by a notorious instability and horizontal mobility…This limits the possibility to settle in any labour community and therefore the possibility to establish a social and political presence” (Kruse, 2000 in Beneria, 2001).

In Romania women’s situation is special, because of the contextual particularities. The Communist regime dominant for almost 45 years gave birth to a mixture between the traditionalist male breadwinner model and the “100 percent active population” model. A great contribution to this mixture have had Romanians’ mentality and the social policies implemented during the last years, together with Romania’s major efforts to integrate in the Euro-Atlantic structures. When talking about gender in relation with the societal dimensions of human life, one can easily notice the breadth of the subject. I have chosen to restrict the discussion by taking into account as guide-lining theory the one described by Jane Lewis (in Pascal and Manning, 2000), who argues for the need to understand welfare regimes in terms of their relation to traditional family structures of male breadwinner/female dependant. In order to achieve this level of understanding, it must be analyzed the regime’s impact on gender by reference to women’s roles in the society, as partners/wives, carers/providers, and, most of all, as paid employees, mothers and policymakers/citizens (Pascall and Manning, 2000). In addition, I will also focus on women’s educational levels and their degree of involvement in educational programmes. It is of special importance to include a discussion on the state-market-family relations as the impact of the state provision on gender relations, in particular the treatment of paid and unpaid labour, social citizenship, access to paid work and capacity to form and maintain an autonomous household. I will closely follow the directions of discussion opened by Gillian Pascal and Nick Manning (2000), regarding the ways in which the policies for women do affect the terms on which they take part in families; the way and the extent to what women’s roles are sources of entitlement to welfare provision and how does this affect women’s relation to the family; how do the levels and the quality of the provision and changes in these affect women’s position in the family, their unpaid care work, their statuses on the labour market, their desires and possibilities to improve their educational baggage, also their ability to imagine and negotiate changes in these roles and their ability to live outside families.
This paper is aimed at understanding the present and past mechanisms that contributed to the situation of today’s Romanian women. Sweden has, in this tableau, the role of “standard” for comparison. In Romania, the “modified” Social Democracy has estranged women’s roles/statuses within different societal systems, from the roles/statuses that should have been gained under a veritable Social Democracy, as in Sweden. The reasons of this difference are questioned here.

**Brief discussion on the methodology**

As method for research I have used the secondary analysis. I have taken into consideration data from recent censuses and social surveys, as well as data from the statistical yearbooks and other sources (series of macro-level demographic and economic indicators, time series mainly excerpted from printed public statistics, as well as quantitative data from different official investigations, to provide examples for the discussion of the topics investigated, micro-level data, from specific surveys, and register data), in a comparative perspective. On the basis of these data, I have build trends and graphs, for a better visual perception and understanding of the explanation and discussion.

I have chosen to use public numeric and non-numeric documents, in a comparative and longitudinal approach, in order to emphasize the effects of different social policies, the relations between social policies and fertility or women’s rate of participation on the labour market, as well as between women’s involvement in different educational programmes and their status on the labour market. I will interconnect different theories and sustain my demonstrations with empirical arguments, provided by these series of data.

This is a study that combines the applicative research and the evaluative research. I use a comparative longitudinal strategy, only one method, non-obtrusive (not implying the interaction between the researcher and the subject) (Marginean, 2000), non-interactive and mainly quantitative.

**My model of analysis**

Peoples’ mentalities (e.g. values, stereotypes, convictions, ideals, social norms), together with the social policies elaborated by governments and the recent history of the country have a strong impact on peoples’ choices (and especially women’s choices) about their involvement in educational programmes and their labour market participation. For example, in a traditionalist region dominated by a strong “male breadwinner” model, where social policies do not encourage women’s “de-familiarization” (Pascall and Manning, 2000), their choices will be towards postponing or even canceling the involvement in both educational systems and labour market, with the direct consequence of weakening their roles/statuses, decision-making capacity and possibilities, social/civic/political participation and so on. The reverse is also very possible (and the Scandinavian countries constitute the example). The vicious cycle is always present and may be broken only by crucial decisions or events, like regime-changing, wars, external very strong economic or/and political influences and so on. Considering these, and in particular the special situation of Romania after the 1989 Revolution, I have found it appropriate to build a causal model which would help me follow the analysis in this paper; I have described the model in the below figure.

Figure 1. My model of analysis – the relations between people’s mentalities, social policies and the recent history of a country, on one side, and the choices about the educational levels and the labour market participation, on the other. The model will be analyzed for the particular case of women.
I consider the model suited for the analysis of the situation in any country. As it will be easy to notice, I did not followed in my presentation exactly the sequence described above, but I pointed out the most relevant connections between these variables, for both Romania and Sweden.

**Brief presentation of the legacy of the past**

**The legacy of the past in Romania and the shift of the last decade**

When previously Romania had been peasant based, with low industrial development, the post-1945 Communist regime set about building up an extensive industrial basis, intended to provide workers with better living standards than was possible under the former capitalist system, and was based on two important principles (Makkai, 1994): all people, regardless of sex and race, were equal politically, economically and socially; all those capable of working in the paid labour market should do so and all major forms of entitlements and rewards in the new society were to be based on this form of active participation on the labour market.

Apart of the hidden privileges available to the nomenklatura (Deacon, 2000) that breached the essential contract of the Communist ideology, the former social-welfare regime in Romania can be by far characterized as universalistic. The contract between the party-state apparatus and the people consisted of the provision of highly subsidized prices in food, for all people, regardless their income, also for housing, transport and basic necessities, guaranteed employment, adequate health and education provision and small differentials between the wages of workers, professionals and managers, in return for the political quietude of the population. During their 1980s, all Eastern European countries spent over one fifth of their GDP (Makkai, 1994) on social programmes and on the subsidization of goods and services.

The official constitutional position of women under the Communist regime was consequently that of equality with men. Marriage and family were liberalized, sexually exploitative images and writing were prohibited, and generally speaking, equal educational opportunity for women was promoted. Services were targeted first at the need for women’s labour. A bridge of social investment in childcare and other services supported women’s place in the labour market. High labour participation was achieved, with women spending most of their adult lives in paid work, at a much earlier period than in the West.

Despite of all these measures, the communist conception was entrenching difference rather than equality. First, with the occurrence and rapid development of the pro-natalist policies, the maternal ideology found itself in competition with the duty of labour. Social policies’ challenge to traditional roles had indeed great impact on women’s participation in paid employment, but, in the same time, traditional motherhood was idealized and sustained. It was women’s responsibility to bear and to raise children, so that the regime could be characterized as sustaining women’s roles as both mothers and workers. Public policies for women’s paid employment, mixed with an unreconstructed domestic division of labour, had as immediate effect women’s “double’s burden”. Labour markets were segregated. Women’s earnings were lower than men. Law interdicted abortions in 1966. So women’s palette of choices was very much restricted in all social areas, and they practically became subordinated not only to their husbands/partners of life or only to the state, but to both.

After the 1989 Revolution, there could be noticed an immediate orientation of the new government towards replacing the one/party political system by a political system that provided for a degree of democracy and the centralized command economy with an economy governed by the rules of the market. The political change was not that difficult, as in Romania a few parties (the Romanian “historical” parties) were still active, but interdicted - as illegal - by the Communists. It was also the beginning of the globalisation process, which started together with the opening of the borders and with the first foreign investors, and which have had important effects for women’s choices.

The globalisation process in Romania has been understood in all its aspects: as technological globalisation, the globalisation of economy by trends in all kinds of markets – financial, of consumer goods and services, of labour force, etc., globalisation of politics and globalisation of culture (Genov, 2002). Globalisation has also meant, to a certain extent, de-nationalization, the convergence of macro-economic trends, the openness of frontiers, international cooperation, the increase of free trade and commercial exchanges, but also a strong pressure to heterogeneity and to protection of the
autochthonous values, as a reaction to all these changes (Glatzer and Langlois, 2000). However, modernization is seen as the major force behind globalization. Even if the former state socialist welfare regime of Romania may appear to be dominated by the continental model of welfare provision, with the state having a fundamental subsidiary role in emphasizing a traditional patriarchal family structure, Romania’s present social policy can be hardly characterized as passing a period of “institutional continuity”, as Bob Deacon states (2000). It is true that the economic, legal and political reform had been more evident, but there were also important shifts in social policy. The breakdown of the state socialist order and the move toward a market economy has resulted more in an “institutional vacuum” with the social policy system transforming from a “monistic” to a “pluralistic” system (Makkai, 1994). Many of the benefits have been changed from universalistic to means-tested; new social-security funds have emerged; there were introduced previously non-existent benefits, as the unemployment benefit is – because unemployment was made explicit where previously it had been hidden.

Discrepancies and gaps appeared as compared to the Western countries because of certain particular aspects of the Romanian society: the globalization of values and norms is slower in Romania and consequently the four forms of globalization described by Nikolai Genov (2002) and enumerated above do not equally and simultaneously develop; the old values and norms are thus confronted with new technologies, economic trends and values they cannot adequately and immediately respond. On the other hand, the democratic procedures of decision-making are slow and very often focused on a short time perspective since they have the electoral cycle as general orientation system (even the most democratic political parties show tendencies towards bureaucratization and clientelism).

It is true that women’s lives are as dramatically affected, as they were when the command economy was instituted. First, the new social policies designed to support the compatibility of family and the labour market careers are inconsistent. Together with the liberalization of abortion, they constituted the main cause of the sharp decrease in fertility (see Figure 2); the effects will be seen in 20-30 years, when the dependence rate will be huge and many schools empty, among other problems.

Figure 2. Total fertility rates for Romania and Sweden, selected years.


Second, the fast industrialization and the collectivization of agriculture from the Communist period has been followed by an attempt for the re-agrarization of economy, equal with a de-modernization process. The change of property relations often took destructive forms of division of plots, which cannot facilitate effective production as seen from the technological point of view. Third, the weakening of the state institutions gave impetus to a crime-wave. Newly introduced neo-liberal policies and the criminalization of economy determined fast economic differentiation. All these effects affected Romanian women’s lives, by reducing their capacity of being both mothers and breadwinners, or mothers and students.

“The Swedish Model”. Context and characteristics

“The Swedish Model” represents the postwar structure coherence and it is based on a stringent macroeconomic policy, a supply-side market policy, an innovation support through measures such as
corporate taxation and technology procurement, which led to high growth, low unemployment and the development of a robust industrial structure, firmly based on the political dominance of Social Democracy.

During the last decade there were registered significant changes, as the employers have been seeking to introduce a neo-liberal model after 1990 (together with the internationalization of the Swedish companies), which subsequently led to the co-existence of a fairly vital accumulation regime (based on flexible mass-production with large companies oriented to international markets and with national-supplier networks in the context of the rapid growing of the ICT sector) and a mode of regulation combining macroeconomic stability with attempts at limiting the social consequences of unemployment and maintaining a redistributive social policy (Benner, 2001).

However, Social Democracy in Sweden seemed to have, to a certain extent, the desired effects, which can be measured, for example, in the fertility rates trend that registered in the beginning of the 1990s a slight increase; this was explained by the development of a comprehensive social insurance system in which benefits are income-based and cover a large part of gross income, but also by the increasing female-to-male relative wages, woman-friendly working conditions, improved real economic conditions, together with the development of the male breadwinner model into the dual breadwinner model, but strongly supported by the state (Stanfors, 2003). The subsequent decrease was explained by the convergence of a series of factors as the expansion of mass education of women, the development of women’s labour market participation, sustained by the tax reform in 1991, which reduced marginal tax rates and made it more economically rational for women to work full-time; women have changed their productive and reproductive behaviour, and, with the increasing involvement in education and labour market, postponed childbearing and reduced the intervals between births (ibidem), thus counteracting the governmental actions to increase responsibility for welfare, education and care for the young and the elderly as a transfer of the production of services from unpaid work in the home to paid work in central and local government.

In Romania Social Democracy has also been the leading ideology since 1989, even during 1996-2000, when the President was a member of The National Paysan Christian Democrat Party. But, unlike the Social Democratic Sweden, Social Democracy in Romania was very young as active political formation, and yet confronted with huge budgetary holes inherited from the Communist regime, the intrusion of global markets and with other problems which it could not manage alone and because of which it could not develop as pure Social Democracy, but had to accept the neo-liberal influences from the part of the IMF and the BM, counteracted only by the aim of joining the European Union.

A discussion upon women’s role in the past and the present society

The roles considered in this paper as of a maximum importance for women in the nowadays society are those of women as paid workers, of women in social, civil and political action and of women as mothers and lone mothers (Pascall and Manning, 2000). They are, evidently, interconnected, and also have essential links with the roles of women as providers of care, health, and education and as partners/wives. But because of the specific of the paper, the focus will be placed on the first three. In addition, I will discuss women’s places/roles in the educational system, mainly as subjects of learning, and the impact on their involvement in learning programs on their status in different societal subsystems.

Women as paid workers

Women as workers under the Communist Regime in Romania

As Pascall and Manning (2000) affirm, occupational welfare was a key source of entitlement under state socialism. Work was, for women, as well as for men, both moral obligation and essential welfare “passport”, because only working persons were entitled for certain benefits. A significant percent of the housing stock was controlled by enterprises and not by the local governments. In an attempt to attain a model similar to the “Japanese” one, holidays, transportation to work, food and other consumer items were provided by employers and unions, which also managed social security.
Health care and childcare were also available at work. A work unit became an “all-encompassing” welfare institution (Zheng, 2000).

As it can be easily noticed, the system had advantages and shortcomings. Thus, the advantage of job security for many did not counter the absence of the unemployment benefit. Second, although workers’ wages compared with average wages, the party and state bureaucrats benefited, as I have already stated, from hidden privileges, not unknown to the masses. The difference between women and men’s wages was not significant. Workingwomen received favorable treatment, such as one-year childcare grants and the right to resume previous employment. However, there was an obligation for women not only to work, but also to remain responsible for family care, so the division of labour remained sexist (Deacon, 2000). The “double burden” of work and care was not shifted, in spite of the availability of both work and welfare provision, in cash and kind, to facilitate childcare, mainly because of two reasons: the quality of the childcare services, much lower than it should have been, and the mentality of people, under the influence of the traditionalist model that states that women must raise the children, as first priority, leaving education, work, careers on the other secondary and tertiary places in their priorities plan. Occupational segregation was high despite the rhetoric about equality.

Workingwomen under the transition to labour market conditions in Romania

The 1989 Revolution has brought a decrease of the females in the total labour force in Romania, when in Sweden the trend was ascending and subsequently constant (Figure 3).

Figure 3. Females of the total labour force in Romania and Sweden, selected years.

![Figure 3](image.png)


The transition to labour market conditions made legislation to be seen by the private companies as a burden, and many have reduced their demand for women’s labour, especially in private firms. Investors and private entrepreneurs do not agree, for example, the fact that they must pay for the maternity leave for two years for their employed women – however, a very recent governmental decision (Codul Muncii, 2003) constitutes an attempt to protect women’s rights as workers. According to this decision, employers are forbidden to fire pregnant women in order not to pay the maternity leave; they cannot fire: pregnant women, if the employer had been announced upon this situation before he took the firing decision; women in the maternity leave; women in paid leave, for raising the child who is not two years old yet, or three years for disabled children, or for taking care of the sick child, if the child is not 7 years yet, or 18 years old for the disabled children. This is a universalistic measure, meaning that it applies for all women, regardless their income, profession, or status.

The “double burden” of work and care is still present also because gender relations remained, for the most part, unreconstructed and because of the present situations of the kindergartens – state governed kindergartens do not offer the best conditions a mother would like for her child; private kindergartens are most of the times more expensive than a family winning the average salary could afford. This is an interesting phenomenon happening in the last decade on the 20th century. On one hand, social supports that enable women to be paid and unpaid workers were drastically reduced, the “double burden” was almost certainly increasing and the social support provided by the workplace or
by state institutions was offering poor facilities (while the private institutions demand for high fees – the fee in a private kindergarten in Bucharest, the Capital, is of 200 US Dollars, when the minimum salary on economy is of 75 USD and the medium salary on economy is of 130 USD). On the other hand, the idea of women’s high labour market participation induced in the Communist regime era is deeply grounded in people’s minds and it is strengthening. It is normal for the mentality of the people not to change that soon, because it consists of believes strongly rooted in their personality system. And the effect of this factor has been the decrease of women’s dependency on family relationship. But the first factor comes and counterbalance this effect, proving to be a serious constraint to “bachelor’s life”, separation or divorce, especially because housing access is also restrained for single persons because of the highly and continuously increase prices, and because of the gender pay gap (even if gender differentials in income are not extremely high, they are existing, and are doubled by the fact that the real incomes are also low, too low to afford independent housing, and also too low for single mothers to escape poverty). The gender pay ratios (female monthly wages as a percent of male monthly wages) also showed women’s necessity for reliance on men, as they are decreasing from 78.6 percent for Romania in 1994 to 76.2 percent in 1997 (Pascall and Manning, 2000). Furthermore, the high labour force participation of women means that any restructuring of the economy and social policy will differentially impact on them as workers and as consumers. Many health and recreational facilities provided by enterprises for their employees were abolished and converted into local community or private facilities. Initially generous unemployment benefits were scaled back after few years, in the liberal belief that this measure would lead to reemployment. But it did not, as the data shows (Table 1). The conclusion was that the limitation was not introduced as primarily aimed at stimulating reemployment but because of the budgetary pressure. The percent of people receiving benefit was low (under 40 percent (Deacon, 2000)).

Table 1. Total unemployment rate and female unemployment rate (percent of female labour force) in Sweden and Romania, selected years.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Unemployment rate</th>
<th>‘80</th>
<th>‘90</th>
<th>‘91</th>
<th>‘92</th>
<th>‘93</th>
<th>‘94</th>
<th>‘95</th>
<th>‘96</th>
<th>‘97</th>
<th>‘98</th>
<th>‘99</th>
<th>‘00</th>
<th>‘01</th>
<th>‘02</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Romania</td>
<td>Total unemployment rate</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8.2</td>
<td>10.4</td>
<td>10.9</td>
<td>9.5</td>
<td>6.6</td>
<td>8.9</td>
<td>10.4</td>
<td>11.8</td>
<td>10.5</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Female unemployment rate</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>10.3</td>
<td>12.9</td>
<td>12.9</td>
<td>11.4</td>
<td>7.5</td>
<td>9.3</td>
<td>10.4</td>
<td>11.6</td>
<td>10.1</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>Total unemployment rate</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>7.5</td>
<td>8.8</td>
<td>8.2</td>
<td>8.1</td>
<td>8.8</td>
<td>7.4</td>
<td>6.2</td>
<td>5.7</td>
<td>4.4</td>
<td>4.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Female unemployment rate</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>8.2</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* No data.


Female unemployment rates were also higher than the total unemployment rates, which had a strong negative impact on their decisions about having children, living alone or changing the “male breadwinner” model. But another immediate impact was on the decisions upon education attainment, as it will be discussed below.

Pensions are another group who increase the dependency rate (computed as the proportion between the number of employed persons and the number of retired persons in a country). In 1990, the retirement age in Romania was of 50 years for women and of 55 years for men. By the mid 1990s, the IMF, the WB and ILO made pressures on the government to start the discussion upon the increasing the age of retirement in small steps, over the next years. However, a considerable number of early retirements as an alternative to unemployment was not easing the pension burden overall. And this raise of the retirement age have also had considerable effect on women, as the older but still in power families could not take care of the children and of the elderly any longer. In 1990, Romania had a normal dependency rate of 3.42. After 1990, the number of retirements has rapidly increased especially because people saw in retirement a method to counteract the problems
produced by the transition to a market economy, as unemployment is, and, by the end of the century, the number of sustained people overlapped the number of the active population. A higher dependency rate means higher budgetary pressure and the need to restrain the expenses; the effect was seen in lower amounts of money allocated for public services and education, with direct effect on women’s lives, especially if they have children. All the other variables above mentioned impacted on women’s lives. As female unemployment was for a long period of time higher that men’s, reducing unemployment benefits (meaning especially the decrease of the real level of benefits because of the very high inflation rates) was in the first place a blow for women. All these not only that restricted women’s choices as regard their education, labour market participation, maternity or lifestyles, but they made them dependent both on the state and on their husbands/partners. Even if they are participating as active persons on the labour market, they are still living the “male breadwinner” modified model – with two breadwinners, but one of them (almost always the feminine one) forced to accept a role that practically do not differentiate much from the traditional housewife.

*Examples of gender differentials mirrored on the labour market*

The easiest way for employers to explain their decisions of laying off especially women when restructuring their companies was that because women’s physical characteristics made them less adaptable to various job requirements, excessive employment of women reduces the efficiency of the enterprise (Zheng, 2000). They also added as arguments maternity and the fact that women have less technical qualifications and are much more employed in auxiliary and service positions, which are to be laid off first in a restructuring productive enterprise. This is valid for China, but also for other countries, as Romania is. But how do women get to be engaged only in these kinds of activities, and why, once they reach a managerial position, do not change these rules that stand to reason? Lourdes Beneria (2001) has made some observations in this regard; first, she argues that the feminization of the labour force during the past three decades has intensified the reliance of many women on informalized employment. By feminization of the labour force it is understood both an increase in women’s labour force participation and the deterioration of working conditions in previously male jobs (Anker, 1998, Standing, 1999 in Beneria, 2001). Subcontracted work and home-based production illustrate many of the problems associated with women’s informal employment. Second, the desentralization of production has meant more informal labour contracts, many of which have gone underground, women concentrated at lower levels of production, gendered layoffs and relocation of production, gendered differences in income loss. Third, women’s primary involvement in domestic and child care responsibilities continues to be a source of vulnerability for them, not only because it represents unpaid work, but also because it diminishes women’s mobility and autonomy to design their labour market strategies. A counteracting trend is that of women’s organization under different associations and institutions aiming to take up actions at the national and international level. The thing that distinguishes these associations one from another is that some of them are less “visible” in their actions than others.

When talking about gender differentials I must necessarily stress two important points: the problem of the “glass ceiling” and the “tokens” issue. “Glass ceilings” or “glass walls” are metaphors used to express the factor that stops women’s careers at middle-level management or expert positions. The so-called “tokens” are defined as women and men in non-traditional work roles who are sole or one of few representatives of their sex in the workplace (Melkas and Anker, 1998). During the former regime, in Romania the glass ceiling was present, as in the present times, but the “tokens” issue was much reduced. One could easily encounter welder-women, women working in the construction sector, women on cranes and so on. The reappearance of the “tokens” after 1989 shows that the influences came from the West together with the globalisation process. Researches realized in the 1970s in the US and France with the aim of establishing aptitudinal profiles for the males and females (Ionescu and Trandafir, 1999) had as result the conclusion according to which for both sexes the abilities tend to be situated at the same level, the differences being rather connected with the interpersonal communication style and the managerial style. The inference led to the statement that women’s exclusion from the army or their low participation because the sexist restrictive entrance regulations are wrongly argued. In the Romanian military air force there are four promotions which have graduated the Air Force Military School, meaning 68
women, of which 38 worked in the civil aviation and only 24 in the military air force. Of these women, today are still active 20 in the civil aviation (piloting only light planes) and 15 in the military aviation (piloting only helicopters), but there is no woman in a managerial place. However, a law in project is to be implemented as beginning with January 1st, 2004, stating that women will have equal rights with men if they decide to enter the army.

In the Romanian legislation, in 2001, there were very few documents to regulate the problem of the equality between men and women. The law 210/1999 regarding the paternal leave allows fathers a five days leave at child’s birth and subsequently, a 10 days supplementary leave, if they engage to follow a puericulture course. Another document is the Governmental Ordinance 137/2000, which defines the notion of discrimination and where are stipulated contraventional and even penal sanctions for the persons who do not respect the regulations. In 2001 The Ministry of Work and Social Protection formulated the Law regarding the equality of chances between women and men, in work, education, health, culture, information and participation to the decision-making process. It has been aimed at protecting women especially in front of gendered discrimination at hiring, promotion, remuneration and layoff, sexual harassment; also, women were not any longer obliged, when applying for a job, to hand in a certificate containing the result of a pregnancy test, as some of the companies requested. The law is welcome in the context of non-existence of other laws to protect women’s rights towards the decisional instances, but the sanctions proved to be not significant (consisting in fines of 1,5 to 15 million Romanian lei, approximately 45 to 459 USD, according to the currency in May 2003). Another impediment for a woman who experiences the gender differentiated treatment is that the complains may be solved only by trade-unions, which in many cases are underdeveloped, inactive or do not have an important role to play because of the authoritarian formal leaders, or by Law Courts, an action that request time, money and the abolition of corruption. The new Labour Code published in 2003 also contains measures regarding women’s protection against gender discrimination, already mentioned above.

Differences for women on the labour market in Sweden

Even if during the 20th century Swedish women’s position on the labour market in Sweden was oscillatory, today they have a firm role and status, different from the Romanian’s women, and that is seen in the strengthening of the “dual breadwinner” model in the recent years and the slight increase of the fertility rate.

A comparison between the growth rate of the real wages and the total fertility rate improves our understanding of the relation between income and fertility in Sweden – they both have a similar wave-like pattern, as fertility increases during periods of increasing growth in real wages and decreases in years in which the growth rate in real wages is falling. Maria Stanfors (2003) studied this issue in detail, and she concluded that female-to-male relative wage also shows a strong trend of improvement. In 1913, the average hourly wage of female blue-collar workers was 58 per cent of the corresponding male wage. By 1995, it had reached 90 per cent. The author also argues that from around 1980 and onwards, notably in the 1990s, wage differentials increased within occupational groups, yet this was balanced by a redistribution of women to higher positions within the employment structure, and that this general equalization of wages can be explained by ideological and political factors (especially the solidarity wage policy and equal opportunity legislation – in 1947, Sweden became a forerunner regarding equal employment opportunities with the passing of the law of “equal pay for equal work”, followed by similar agreements and laws in the subsequent years), or by the model of price determination in the labour market – the rapid and continuous rise in relative wages was triggered by a dynamic shortage of female labour in periods of economic change, extensive rationalization of production processes as well as the expansion of the public service sector, which produced a rise in female-to-male relative wages.

I was talking in the beginning of the paper of the fact that even if in both countries the Social Democratic regime has been leading for some time now, there are discrepancies in the effects of the policies because of the particular contexts in every country. For example, in Romania unemployment rates have been oscillatory, but at high values, during the last decade (as Table 1 shows), and women’s unemployment rates are higher or at least equal to the general unemployment rate values, slightly decreasing during the last few years. In Sweden the situation is somehow more stable, the
rate knowing a descending trend, with female’s unemployment rate also decreasing, under the general rate. But the situation is similar in the two countries when taking into consideration gender segregation on the labour market, as I will prove below.

Even if the year the data showed above were collected differs (1990/2000, because of the differences of source), it is easy to notice that, in both countries, women are involved more in education, health, social welfare, hotel and restaurants, textile industry, banking and insurance activities, and less in constructions and the industrial sectors, generally speaking. Their participation as employees in radio, TV and communication sectors is almost equal to men’s, as well in trade and commerce and electric machinery and appliances.

Table 2. Employees, by activity of national economy and by sex, on December 31st, 2000, in Romania (thousand persons).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sector of national economy</th>
<th>Total employees</th>
<th>Of which, men</th>
<th>Of which, women</th>
<th>Women, percent of the total employment/row</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Education, health and social assistance</td>
<td>410</td>
<td>130</td>
<td>280</td>
<td>68.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public administration</td>
<td>147</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>58.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial, banking and insurance activities</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>71.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hotels and restaurants</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>64.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Construction</td>
<td>313</td>
<td>271</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>13.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Industry*</td>
<td>1913</td>
<td>1058</td>
<td>855</td>
<td>44.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sylviculture, forestry and hunting</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>11.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agriculture</td>
<td>122</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>26.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Radio, TV, and communication equipment and apparatus</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>53.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Including electric and thermal energy, gas and water.


Table 3. Proportion of female to total employment in the modern sector, 1990 (percent), in Sweden.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sectors of the national economy</th>
<th>Percent of the total employment</th>
<th>Sectors of the national economy</th>
<th>Percent of the total employment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mining</td>
<td>12.9</td>
<td>Clothing</td>
<td>79.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engineering</td>
<td>17.0</td>
<td>Textiles</td>
<td>53.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Electro-technical</td>
<td>34.7</td>
<td>Leather and rubber</td>
<td>35.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Metal</td>
<td>18.1</td>
<td>Chemical</td>
<td>32.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quarrying, clay, glass</td>
<td>17.1</td>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>24.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wood</td>
<td>16.5</td>
<td>Post and telegraph</td>
<td>48.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pulp, paper, printing</td>
<td>25.0</td>
<td>Trade and commerce</td>
<td>48.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Food and beverage</td>
<td>37.8</td>
<td>Banking and insurance</td>
<td>62.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hotels and restaurants</td>
<td>60.7</td>
<td>Health and medical care</td>
<td>83.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social welfare</td>
<td>90.4</td>
<td>Education and research</td>
<td>64.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Construction</td>
<td>8.7</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Gender segregation on the labour market is obvious and its primary source is the educational segregation. It is very clear that today’s Romanian labour market is clearly segregated into “female jobs” and “male jobs”, a model imported after the Revolution from the Western society (Sweden being part of it), where is still strong, regardless positive discrimination actions promoted not only by women’s associations, but also by governments. Women’s jobs are related to lower incomes, often to part-time job structures for which they do not receive any provisions, and consequently to a lower status on the labour market. The direct effect is on women’s statuses as wives, partners and mothers, in terms of inequality when compared to men’s statuses, who bring higher incomes, have full time jobs and thus are the bearer of a higher degree of security for the household.

Women and the educational system

Education must be regarded as a factor of change for certain variables of the model I have initially built: labour market participation, people’s roles/statuses, their mentality and, through their mentality, their general choices.

According to Bob Deacon (2000), in the Communist era the educational system was geared too much to the production of academically and professionally qualified people and too little to the needs of the industry, so that many graduates found themselves in jobs for which they were overqualified. With a commitment to universal benefits, education (as well as health services) was on the whole provided free. Those provisions were seen as being more equitable than cash benefits, and they supplemented low wages. Because wage differentials were low and everybody was practically obliged to work, generally speaking, people were not motivated to get involved in educational programmes, other than the compulsory ones.

Under Communism, women in Romania pursued many educational opportunities available to them, maintaining one of the world highest levels of women’s education, including fields considered nontraditional for women in other parts of the world; but the pressure of market forces on the educational sector, and the emergence of diverse cultural values in regard to women’s education have changed the landscape of education.

On one side, women have stepped out of the traditional “male” educational fields; on the other side, they have begun to perceive education as an alternative to unemployment and to get involved to a higher extent in educational programmes of all levels. The perception is, in fact, generalized for the total population. Tables 3 and 4 emphasize these trends.

But still gender segregation in education is rather high (Table 4). “Educational segregation” is high in Romania also because of the strong influence of the traditionalist model, especially in rural areas, but where there are situated 85 percent of the primary and secondary schools of the total number of schools in the country. Ingrid Jonsson (1999) argues that in Sweden there was also noticed an increase in women’s education, and states that there are four factors explaining differences in female participation in education: the expansion of the educational system, the structure of the educational system, public social services and the “ideologies of motherhood” in every country – to what extent women are regarded primarily as workers or mothers.

Table 4. Degrees obtained by the female and male population, as compared to the male population, 1997, in Romania and Sweden (percent of the total population).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Field</th>
<th>Women</th>
<th>Men</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>Degrees in Education</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Degrees in Engineering</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Degrees in Law</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Romania</td>
<td>Degrees in Education</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Degrees in Engineering</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Degrees in Law</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

High educational qualifications facilitate more rewarding positions in the labour market, increased access to public life and to a larger degree of independence. Women with higher educational qualification often work outside the home than women with lower qualifications do. Unemployment hits the latter group harder (Jonsson, 1999). Demographic changes have also been of a special importance for women, as they pushed them towards positive choices regarding the involvement in educational programmes.

Table 5. Employment structure by training level, in 2000 (percent in columns), in Romania.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Training level</th>
<th>Total employment</th>
<th>15-27 years</th>
<th>25-34 years</th>
<th>35-49 years</th>
<th>50-64 years</th>
<th>65 + years</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Higher education</td>
<td>9.1</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>10.8</td>
<td>12.1</td>
<td>9.5</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Specialty Post High School or Technical Foremen Education</td>
<td>4.4</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>5.6</td>
<td>5.7</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High School</td>
<td>29.1</td>
<td>32.1</td>
<td>48.0</td>
<td>32.6</td>
<td>9.6</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vocational, complementary or apprenticeship</td>
<td>21.6</td>
<td>23.9</td>
<td>25.3</td>
<td>28.2</td>
<td>13.6</td>
<td>2.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondary school</td>
<td>21.6</td>
<td>32.7</td>
<td>10.0</td>
<td>18.2</td>
<td>32.9</td>
<td>28.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary or without graduated school</td>
<td>14.2</td>
<td>6.0</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>28.7</td>
<td>66.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


After the 1989 Revolution in Romania has occurred a major phenomenon (apart of the desecularization of education and pluralization of control over schools): the privatization, to a certain extent, of the education. This process was mostly concentrated at the tertiary level. In 1990 there were practically no students enrolled privately at any level, but in the years after, the number boosted at 30.7 percent of its tertiary pupils in private universities. Generalized subsidies were replaced by targeted subsidies, so that fees were beginning to be charged (but with rebates and grants for the meritorious and the needy). Table 6 emphasizes the repartition of the primary and secondary level institutions/enrolled pupils, on forms of property, in the academic year 1989/1990 in Romania.

Table 6. The repartition of the primary and secondary level institutions/enrolled pupils, on forms of property, in the academic year 1989/1990 in Romania.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of education</th>
<th>Institutions</th>
<th>Pupils</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Number</td>
<td>Percent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public education</td>
<td>15701</td>
<td>99.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private education</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>0.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cooperatist education</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>0.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>15740</td>
<td>100.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Data source: Dima, 2002.

Table 7. The situation of the private schools in Romania at December 1st, 1999.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The total number of formal educational institutions</th>
<th>Pre-school</th>
<th>Compulsory education</th>
<th>Upper secondary education</th>
<th>Post-upper secondary education</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>353</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>223</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Data source: Dima, 2002.

Higher education in state institutions in Romania is evidently financed by the state. In Sweden, while in 1995, 98.3 percent of the educational institutions were publicly funded and only 1.7 percent privately funded; in 1999, 97.0 percent of them were funded of public sources and 3.0 percent of private sources. When talking only about tertiary education, in 1995 93.6 percent of the institutions were funded of public sources and 6.4 percent of private funds; in 1999 the numbers were of 88.4 and 11.6 percent respectively (OECD, 2002). The occurrence of the private institutions for higher
education in Romania was explained by the incapacity of the state education institutions to take over immediately the biggest part of the people wishing to follow a faculty (Dima, 2002); there was noticed also a strong valorization of the higher education by the population, who saw in higher education a mean to fight unemployment and low quality of life. There were also brought to discussion the massive demand for competencies in certain domains, such as management or law, and the lacunose legislation in the domain of setting up and developing private higher education institutions, which determined the introduction of a system of academic accreditation and evaluation, especially because of the exclusive financing from the students’ fees, which raised question marks upon the quality of the academic services. Figure 4 shows the trend of the number of students in private higher education institutions in Romania, 1992-1999.

Figure 4. The trend of the number of students in private higher education institutions in Romania, 1992-1999.

Data source: Dima, 2002.

Social support such as free meals provided in schools were hardly known even during the Communist regime. But after 1989, in some schools they were introduced, as a measure to help the parents who want to continue their work on the labour market as full employees. A special measure, in this regard, was introduced in the autumn of 2002, when the Romanian government decided that all pupils from the primary schools would receive daily a horn-shaped roll and a glass of milk paid by the state budget; the measure will expand beginning with the academic year 2003/2004 also for the children in kindergartens. Despite of all discussions and accusations that this is only an electoral measure, it seems a welcome measure especially for the poor families. It is a universal measure, as all children, regardless their parents’ income, receive these provisions. Very recently the Romanian Government also decided that parents who do not enroll their 6 years old children in primary schools will be charged consistent fines; by this decision, the authorities have proved that they became more aware of the importance of the education nowadays and that they are decided to act consequently and also increase the awareness of the population as regard this situation. This is important as long as during the last years it was registered a decrease in the number of children enrolled in schools and high schools, from 3850000 in the academic year 1990/1991 to 3311635 in the academic year 2000/2001 (Anuarul Statistic al Romaniei, 2001). The decrease is due to both the demographic processes (a decrease of natality after 1989, with consequences for the school-aged population at the end of the century) and poverty, which determines, especially in the rural areas, giving up school for work in poor jobs or simply giving up school because of the lack of money for food, clothes, books, and other materials necessary for study.

Further discussion

Women as mothers

There are four important elements, the combination of which explains the change taking place in the contemporary society: the transformation of the economy and the labour market, the technological progress in biology, pharmacology and medicine, the feminist movement and the rapid distribution of ideas in a global culture and interrelated world (Castells, 1997). It was said that the high rates of
women’s participation on the labour market, the increase in contraceptive means use, women’s claims for gender equality and, respectively, the rapid distribution of the new conceptions in nowadays world society, through globalisation of all processes, have led to a profound crisis of the patriarchal family. This is much more true for the Swedish families and less true for the Romanian families. Gillian Pascall and Nick Manning (2000) argue that while social policies in Western Europe have often been seen as keeping women at home as housewives or mothers, those in transition countries have played a major role in sustaining women as workers. I do not agree with the two authors upon this point, as in Sweden by law families with children or single mothers with children are strongly supported by the state (when expecting the child and after giving birth – through the parental benefit, the temporary parental benefit, child benefit and supplementary child benefit, maintenance, child care allowance, nursery/kindergarten provision and so on (The National Social Insurance Office, 2001)). The policy regarding women as mothers and workers have been contradictory even since the Communist regime. On one hand, 100 percent active population policy was promoted. On the other, the ordinance 770 from September 29th, 1966, interdicted abortions, defining the infraction of abortion as punishable with 1 to 3 years of detention or correctional interdiction of 1 to 3 months, in a time when contraceptive means were practically inexistent on the market or in the sanitary institutions (Asociatia Primul Pas, 2001). Consequently, women’s possibility of choosing was extremely reduced, as many of them were passing from a maternity leave to another.

As protection and support for children, the Romanian Government in power nowadays has instituted a series of provisions as universal material support for families with children (children allowances until the age of 18, cut of income taxes, gratuities, trying to ensure a decent level of the quality of life); free education and support for school attendance (free manuals, scholarships); free medical assistance (for maternity, for mothers and children); social protection for children with special needs: disabled children, delinquent children. But the major problem is that the amount of money in the allowances is very low and very slight increasing because of the inflationary process. In January 2002 the child allowance was of 150000 Romanian lei (4.7 USD), in July 2002, of 180000 Romanian lei (5.13 USD) and as beginning with 2003 it is of 210000 Romanian lei (5.7 USD) (when in Sweden is of 950 SEK a month (The Swedish Institute, 2001), approximately 112 USD) – for transformations, I have used the currencies from every indicated period. Only unpaid parental leave for taking care of the sick children is available. Furthermore, child services are of a bad quality (especially pre-primary, maternity and child care services), so the growing need for child support is not fulfilled. In the context of high unemployment rate, increasing wage inequality, rising costs and growing poverty, the actual form of the applied measures seems not good enough. It is true that because of the loses to GDP, the public revenue and the market pressure (instituted especially by the policies induced by the IMF and the BM), the provisions are harder and harder to sustain; paper entitlements are not paid; parental leave is shortened to minimum because of job insecurity and the fear of loosing the position; the consequences might be tragic, as it is possible that during the next years to be registered a decrease in the rate of enrollment in pre-school facilities, a decrease in the number of mothers in good jobs on the labour market, a decrease in women’s involvement in adult educational programmes, a decrease in women’s general participation in the social life, a parallel increase of women’s dependance on relationships and a growing assertion of patriarchal family practices. The scholars are posing the question whether women are still forced, because of the given situation, to accept traditional burdens as such, without challenging them, or if is also a question of mentality? This will be discussed later. What I would also like to emphasize here is that the work-family conflict is a situation that must be avoided; work-family conflicts occur when efforts to fulfill work role demands interfere with one’s ability to fulfill family demands and vice versa. Frone, Barnes and Farrell (1994) concluded that this kind of conflict is indirectly related to both heavy alcohol use and cigarette use via negative affect, and that it is a stressor because it represents a threat or impediment to self-identification.

State authorities are trying to face these problems. An example for Romania is the recently adopted governmental ordinance 9/2003 for the change of the law 19/2000. The ordinance states that the allowance accorded to every mother for raising the children who are not two years old yet would be of 4212600 Romanian lei (approximately 130 USD, at the currency in May 2003), regardless of the mother’s income, so of the amount of money paid monthly from the salary as contribution at the
social insurance system. This would, according to the specialists, determine an even sharper decrease of the fertility rate, at a time when pro-natalist measures are needed. The governants replied that this is a pro-natalist decision, as it is universalistic, favors those women who have low salaries and it was grounded in the idea that all women need the same amount of money to raise a child to the age of two. But the truth is that this amount of money equals the average salary on the national economy, and that it is clearly in the detriment of the women with medium and high incomes. Apart of the fact that it is a total absence of respect for women’s right to receive adequate pay for their work, there is another aspect to be discussed: women with medium or high incomes have higher expectations and they would have to renounce at these expectations in order to have a child, which is frustrating and usually provokes the postponing or even the canceling of the decision. Immediately after the governmental decision was made, all Romanian televisions and radios started to broadcast interviews with women asked for opinion about this measure. The most broadcasted interview was that of a women who mentioned that because she had a salary higher than the average salary on economy she decided to live alone and to pay monthly the installment for a house, which is a long-term commitment; if she decides to have a child, the amount of money would not be enough even to pay for the house. The Law of the maternal leave (for raising/caring the upon children) with the guarantee of the work place has also played a major role, especially for women working in private companies (during the Communist period keeping the job during the maternity leave was “taken for granted”).

Women in social, civil and political action

Women’s participation in social, civil and political action is mainly characterized by vertical segregation.
In Romania, women’s participation in the political life before 1989 was high; in 1987, 34 percent of the old legislative Romanian forum, The Great General Assembly of Romania, were women, 5 women out of 40 detained governmental functions; but still, in the Executive Political Bureau, the highest political decision-making forum, in the same year 1987, there were only 2 women out of 21 members. Even if present in these leading forums, women’s roles were more “decorative” (Dima, 2002), and after 1989, because of the abolishment of the quota system, women’s political participation decreased.


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Romania</td>
<td>0 (20.0 in 2000)</td>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>10.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>38.1 (55.0 in 2000)</td>
<td>27.3</td>
<td>30.8</td>
<td>42.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Table 9. Percentage of women in different positions (percent of the total population in the respective positions), 1998.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Clerks</th>
<th>Managers</th>
<th>Members of Parliament</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>72 (men 28 percent)</td>
<td>27 (men 73 percent)</td>
<td>43 (men 57 percent)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Romania</td>
<td>73 (men 27 percent)</td>
<td>26 (men 74 percent)</td>
<td>7 (men 93 percent)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Table 8 shows women’s involvement in politics, especially in state-leading positions. The difference between Sweden and Romania is enormous. Why this huge gap? Of course, there would be the simple explanations of women’s traditional involvement in political affairs. In Sweden, women received the right to vote partially in 1921 (after a partial recognition in 1861); in the same year Swedish women received the right to stand for election (after a partial recognition in 1907); in Romania, they received both the right to vote and the right to stand for election only in 1946 (after a partial recognition in 1929). The level of education gets out of discussion regarding women’s low participation rate in state-leading positions. The number of women-students enrolled in a level of education, regardless of age, as a percentage of the population of official school age for that level, is
of 57 percent in Sweden and of 24 percent in Romania. Even if in Romania the percentage is lower, both for Romania and for Sweden males’ percentage in the same position is even lower, of 43 percent in Sweden and of 21 percent in Romania. I would rather say that there is another factor contributing to this situation - the conception (sustained involuntarily by governmental actions) that women must have as priority “kitchen, care and children”; this might also be a reaction of rejection of everything instituted by the Communist regime, that appeared after the 1989 Revolution and it was visible all during the last decade of the 20th century. Politics is not for women; this is a species of horizontal segregation that creates vertical segregation. It is the same for other sectors; the problem is that a vicious circle is created: because women do not get involved in political activities (generally speaking, in “male” activities), they are not allowed in superior positions, and men, who decide, maintain the horizontal segregation, which is a cause of the vertical segregation.

So in Romania gender issues seem to be state-imposed and there is also little access to ideas from the women’s movements, so that the main source of challenge to the “double burden”, of the low political participation or of women’s participation in decision making processes, is cut away from the start. It is not that women’s associations to defend women’s rights and fight for gender equality in all spheres of social, economic, political and cultural life do not exist, but their activity is very seldom perceived as such, as they are less visible and many times do not actively involve in the decision-making process at high level (which is also the prove of the vicious circle the women are into, from the non-involvement in the important state affairs to their perception as “not interested” by nature by such matters, and back). ANA Organization, The Romanian Women’s Association, Equal Chances for Women’s Foundation, The Center of Partnership for Equality are a few of the independent women’s organizations in Romania; there are also governmental institutions aimed at protecting women’s rights, as The Direction for Chances Equality within the Ministry of Work and Social Protection, or The Sub-commission for Equal Opportunities, subordinated directly to the Romanian Parliament, but they are dependent on the state ideology, so they can not be taken into consideration without the necessary restrictions.

Different policies to promote equal chances for men and women were defined: equal treatment (considering men and women without taking into account any gender differences), positive discrimination (affirmative action) and positive action – as, for example, special courses for women, access to evening courses for women with children, but who decide to continue their education, flexible working programme; the reverted discrimination is also discussed by feminists, as gender-based preference for women in the competition for a rare resource. Gender-differentiated reporting of the data about the population constitutes a very good method for a more reliable grasping of the two genders situation and the evaluation of the effects the policies dedicated to women have. Sweden, in the 1980s, was the first country ever that promoted this kind of gendered-segregated data presentation (Voicu, 2002).

The mentality of nowadays-Romanian people regarding women’s place in the present society

The mentality of nowadays-Romanian people constituted the motivator factor that determined me to think about realizing this study. The census realized at the beginning of the year 2002 pointed out that the total number of the Romanian population is of 21698181 peoples, of which 48.8 percent are women and 51.2 percent are men, respectively 10581350 and 11116831 (Recensamantul populatiei, 2002). Of the total population, 52.7 percent live in urban areas, while 47.3 percent live in rural areas.

As I have previously stated, Romania was known in the beginning of the 20th century as a predominantly agricultural country, with wide segments of the population living in rural areas, characterized by a certain so called “rural” mentality of people, which, as it was expected in fact, lasted over years and is even today difficult to be changed. By mentality I mean convictions, ideals, values, norms, stereotypes, which are deeply rooted in traditions, thus resisting to change even in these times of rapid transformations due to the global “re-thinking” of the societies. They determine people’s choices, generally speaking, and in particular, their participation in educational programmes and on the labour market, thus having an indirect, but strong impact on their roles/statuses; as I have emphasized in my model of analysis (Figure 1), they also affect the decision-making process as regards the social policies, thus doubling the impact the impact on people’s roles/statuses. This is especially applicable for the particular case of women.
Data of the survey realized in August 2000 by the Open Society Foundation and The Gallup Organization are relevant for the mentality of the Romanian people regarding the place and the role women have and/or should have in the Romanian society and they also very well synthesize the issues discussed in this paper. The survey was realized on a 1839 persons aged 18 and over sample; the sample was stratified, probabilistic and tri-stadial and the results are representative for the adult population over 18 years old, with a sampling error of ±2.3%. Table 10 emphasizes some of the results.

Table 10. The perception of the Romanian people upon gender relations, selected questions.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Yes (percent)</th>
<th>Depends (percent)</th>
<th>No (percent)</th>
<th>Don’t know/ don’t answer (percent)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Is it women’s duty more than men’s to undertake the housework?</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is it men’s duty more than women’s to be the main breadwinners in the household?</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In your opinion does a woman have to follow her man?</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are men as able as women in raising children?</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is man the head of the family?</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you agree that domestic work should be paid as any other type of labour?</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>14**</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is there a real equality of rights between women and men in Romania?</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* for these questions, “Depends” do not appear as answering variant.
** the corresponding variant for answer is “I did not think”.


Furthermore, as compared to men, women are perceived by the total population as more sensitive, more heartfelt/caring, as smart/clever as men, but less concerned by local/national affairs. Generally speaking, in the household works like cooking, cleaning, washing the clothes, doing the dishes, doing the ironing, looking daily after the children, supervising children’s homework and spare time, going with the children to the doctor or collecting the children from school are performing exclusively by women, even if domestic work is not regarded as the easiest of all types of work.

The nuances of the answers given for these questions strongly prove the traditionalist way of thinking implanted in Romanians minds since the period of dominance of the agrarian system, unchanged during the Communist regime because of the mixture between the 100 percent active population model and the “male breadwinner” model, which, in the already described context, created the “double burden”. Especially housewives, retired and unemployed, with no more than primary education and predominantly living in the communes/villages agree upon the fact that it is women’s duty more than men’s to undertake the housework. On the other side, students and people with higher education and predominantly people living in the cities do not agree upon this matter. The same differentiations are also observed for peoples’ opinion regarding men’s duty to be the breadwinners in the household, to provide the family money for living, and the opinion that man is the head of the family. It can easily be noticed the influence of the rural conception of life and especially of family life. In the case of the unemployed, it is understandable their option because of the difficult situation they are in for the moment or have been for some time already, that of having no income but the unemployment allowance.

This idea of strong influences from the rural areas and the traditionalist model of the family promoted for so many centuries especially in the rural zones is underlined by the mentality regarding single women with children, who are bad regarded, regardless if they intend or do not intend to get married (almost 50 percent of the total adult population admit the fact that they bad regard these women, lesser youth, people with higher education and from urban areas). And they agree to a great degree
that both parents should raise the children in a family. Just for comparison, the answers given by respondents of similar surveys in Sweden proves a very different mentality: 57 percent of the total population, in 1977, and 39 percent in 1987 think that women should band together and fight for equality; only 22 percent (in 1987) agree upon the fact that fighting for equality is old-fashioned; 74 percent (in 1987) agree that if a woman has better job opportunities, the man should stay at home; and only 19 percent (on 1977) and 14 percent (in 1987) consider that at times of high unemployment it should be the woman who loses her job first (Soderstrom and Syren, without year).

If applying the well-known Thomas’ Theorem for the mentality of the Romanian women, the result is that if they are perceived as dependent to their men and as the “weak” half of the couple, they will end behaving according to this prediction, it will be more difficult for a change to appear and it will take much longer.

When studying them carefully, all these nuances in answers also suggest the fact that a change is about to happen. The data indicate that there are three major factors of change: the young people, who did not experienced the Communist regime with its obtrusive regulations, the highly educated people, who achieved supplementary information and knowledge that open their minds and free them of preconceived ideas and stereotypes, and the peoples living in urban areas, because they are much more exposed to external influences and they have much more opportunities, choices and possibilities to get out of the “traditionalist” umbrella. This should also indicate the domains of necessary “investment” and action for the political actors, in order to achieve a high degree of gender equality – the investment in youth, in higher education and in the development of the urban areas, because of their increased potential of transforming the variables of the present societal equation towards creative effects.

**Discussing the welfare regimes and their effects on women’s roles and statuses**

The socialist East-European model characterized the Communist Romania for almost 45 years (Dima, 2002). Promoting women’s 100 percent active participation in the labour market and sustaining this ideal with adequate measures and a well structured system of child care institutions, supported by the state, the regime omitted the measures to divide the domestic work; together with the weak development of the facilities aimed at easing the domestic work, this is the factor that initially created and maintained women’s “double burden”.

In Romania, the logic of the post-1989 development was towards a mixed welfare policy, because of the combination of the corporatist welfare regimes regulations with the residualist ones, giving birth to a specific, particular model. This was the effect of the historical, political and cultural roots that characterized Romania prior to and after the Second World War, and also of the present economic, social and political circumstances (Makkai, 1994).

The initial tendency was towards a conservative, corporatist kind of welfare policy. The leaders appeared in an attempt of conserving state and workplace benefits in the face of declining resources, under the influence of a less than enthusiastic conversion to the capitalist market system. Property changes took place more slowly, the influence of the Communist ideology of equality and protection for workers was high, trade unions still appeared to be playing a role, and the characteristics of the workplace-worker contact were wanted of the same structure. Highly taxed and re-distributive Social Democratic policies were unlikely to flourish because of the need to encourage new capital.

On the other side, the conditions laid down for receipt of the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank loans encouraged the residualist welfare policy of a liberal state, sustained by the governments pressures in the last decade, in their attempt to gain the IMF’s and the WB’s benevolence. The two institutions are firmly opposed to linking benefits to work and seek to break this tradition as key to unlocking the country from the old order.

The clash between the two sides of the model is mirrored in the struggle between the ministries aspiring to the European welfare model, especially the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, and the ministries declaring the necessity of the United States residualist model, also promoted by the IMF (and by International Labour Organization (Deacon, 2000)), especially the Ministry of Finance. Bob Deacon states that anyhow, in an inflationary and budget-restrained situation like the Romanian situation of the last decade, this essentially corporatist structure (based on a primary state-insurance system for pensions and short-term benefits, a state universal social-support of childcare benefits, but
also a “safety-net” means-tested social-assistance system, as the state only interfere when the family’s capacity to service its members is exhausted, (Esping-Andresen, 1990) could easily evolve into something quite different – a generalized “safety-net” residualist liberalism. Sweden has experienced, as I have stated before, an egalitarian women-friendly model, based on policies that aim at the stimulation of women’s involvement on the labour market and men’s involvement in taking care of children and generally in the family life (with parental paid leave, flexible model of the work-day, facilities for raising/caring the children). But this model, even if at the first sight seen as the “perfect” model, does, in fact, increase the occupational segregation, by forcing women into the public sector, in part-time jobs, which do not ensure them with the social provisions they need, not to talk about the negative men’s discrimination as regards the public sector.

*The role the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank have played in creating the present situation in Romania*

As I have argued above, a major role for the present situation of the Romanian women have had the economic conditions and the budgetary restraints, with special negative impact on women as mothers, women as subjects of learning programmes, as civic and political actors and as employees/unemployed. Later 20th century theories have discussed - and I agree - that political globalisation is having a much serious and visible impact upon the social policies in Romania and, generally speaking, in the region, than economic globalisation has (Deacon, 2000). The latter has only recently impacted upon the social welfare possibilities, in a country that has been subject to short-term currency speculation. So that the changes in policy are to be only partially explained by the pressures that have been presumed to have negatively impacted on the welfare system in Eastern Europe as well as in Western Europe, as a result of the global economic competition: the increase of direct foreign investment, the freeing of trade, changes in technology, and other features of global capitalism; consequently, countries are tempted to reduce their welfare commitments to attract capital to locations where they are less taxed (ibidem), with immediate impact on women’s participation in educational programmes and on the labour market, as active employees (either full time or part time workers).

But economic competition was forcing to a less extent a certain course of action, because global actors such as the IMF and the WB are the ones that have been promulgating for a few years now, for ideological reasons, a particular view of desirable social policy. The secondary effects of the globalisation process and especially of the influence of the global financial actors are easy noticeable in the economic sectors but also in the social sectors. Apart of the short-term speculative capital flows and the long-term foreign direct investment linked to incorporation in the global production system, there appear some shifts in the pensions system towards the privatization of pensions, low wages and high rates of unemployment (some of it resulted from the fact that the exposure to Western goods has challenged the producers of unattractive consumer goods), lowering of the barriers to trade in social insurance, health provision and social services.

The involvement of the IMF and the WB in the national economies have been often criticized and considered improper. The IMF and the WB were considered by some authors as first order instruments of the globalisation process (Stanciu and Ionescu, 2002), but negatively affecting the countries in transition. Some examples are more than suggestive and the situational characteristics described below are applicable also for the Romanian situation.

During the last years, Argentina managed to avoid, with the aid of the IMF, two major banking crisis that would have most probably been followed by a catastrophic mixture of unpaid debts and total collapse of the monetary system, as referring to the USD. This is an affirmation denied by the anti-globalization extremists, who argue that the IMF is responsible for many of the sufferings of the developing countries. One of them, Lucas Lach (without year), states that “the IMF bureaucrats (…) are no more than agents of an ubiquitous financial system that, taking advantage of the globalisation process in expansion, obtains huge incomes in regions poor in capital so that afterwards to leave away suddenly, leaving behind them profound financial crisis”; in this respect, the aid accorded to Argentina could be explained as a maneuver to save the investors amateurs of risks from the considerable loss they would confront in the case of a crisis. Paradoxically, this is also the position of
the conservator isolationism conception: the collapse of Argentina would lead to the extension of the crisis in all Latin America and even in other countries weak from the financial point of view.

Michael Chossudovsky (1998), an expert in this field, described the situation in Rwanda that lead to civil war. Preceding the civil war was a flare-up of a deep-seated economic crisis provoked by the restructuring of the agricultural system that precipitated the population into object of poverty and destitution.

Other countries passed through similar situations, according to each ones specific national situation – Brazil, Columbia, Bulgaria, Indonesia, Thailand, Korea (the so-called “Asian Tigers” (Chossudovsky, 1998)), Vietnam, and Jordan. Romania it is said by many authors to be in the same situation. In exchange for the external loans from the WB and the IMF, Romania had to rapid privatize certain state companies from different industrial sectors, to immediately cut budgets and eliminate the subventions of the unproductive sectors (which determined a fast increase of the unemployment rate), to increase the prices for the public services, to reduce the public sector and to open the local economy to the international competition. The fears of the local specialists that an immediate huge wave of imports would have disastrous effects were counteracted by the assurances from the part of the IMF and the WB that the new jobs created in the exporting firms would compensate the layoffs from other unproductive sectors. But they did not. And furthermore, the increase in the banking interests, having as justification inflation’s maintenance to reasonable levels, let to the discouragement of the local companies.

The effects of these policies are visible today. Romania imports more than it exports. The agriculture, which in the past covered by far the demands of the internal market, today is devalued, the internal production is far under the demands, while large arable areas are not cultivated. The industrial sector has also known a rapid decline, together with the selling for almost nothing of important companies, assets, and riches. Furthermore, the corruption flourished especially through the privatization of key economic sectors, thrown on the hand of local oligarchies, which could buy whole industries for nothing. In 1999, the GDP was 76 percent of the real level of the GDP in 1989, the quality of life was following an descending trend, the average annual level of the inflation rate was in 1997 of 154.7 percent and in 1998 of 59.1 percent, the budgetary deficit was both in 1997 and in 1998 of minus 3.6 percent, while the external debt was of 8444.7 million USD at December 31st, 1997 and of 8967.6 million USD as to December 31st, 1999 (AOAR, 1999). The middle class, who constitutes a country’s the engine for economic development, was of only 9-10 percent of the total population.

It was said that the developing countries cannot bear from the beginning of their transformation the shocks of the permanently changing market law. It was also said that these negative effects were the result of the fact that neither the IMF, nor the WB have any common goals with the countries they lend and also because they do not have to report their actions to anybody (Lumea ca o piata, 2002). It was also said that this situation is the effect of the fact that the industrial production of the great concerns from the West was redirected towards the “periphery”, in searching for increased profits and under the pressure of the environmental Western legislation. In the developing countries, work hand is cheap and the legislation is permissive; but by this movement the local initiative is totally suffocated (Stanciu and Ionescu, 2002). How is it known that these are exactly the effects of the FMI and the WB intervention (which, evidently, they constantly deny)? Quite simple: the countries that “refused” their aid (China, India) have known a constant increase during the last years.

This discussion is important because the effects underlined above do apply also in the particular case of women and their choices – unemployment influences their choices relative to the family type to be in, the number of children and so on; the increasing trend of prices means increasing poverty; cuts in budgets mean cuts in social pogrammes and in family benefits, which influence women’s choices both on the labour market and their involvement in educational programmes.

This strong influence of the main international financial bodies has begun to be counteracted by the European Union ideologies, because of the sustained gearing up Romania to join it.

Conclusions

The globalisation process have meant for the Romanian culture and society both openness and the conservation of the primary instinct of preserving the national values, under the influence of still
strong traditionalist mentalities resistant (and some of them even empowered) under the Communist regime. The process has given birth to a particular model of regarding women in nowadays society. The paper have shaped the relation between people’s mentality, social policies, the historical context and women’s involvement in educational programmes and on the labour market, with special emphasis on women’s situation in Romania and in Sweden. I have extensively discussed the particularities in Romania, because it is a country in transition, recently out of the totalitarian Communist regime, which imprinted special societal trends to the initial social agricultural structure conducted by the traditions of the land. I have underlined the vicious circles Romanian women are into; how the sharp changes of the last years and the rapid deterioration in the quality of life, together with the insufficient social protection measures and the more liberal social policies adopted by the so-called Social Democratic regime have been forcing women’s choices; I have defined women’s social trend as vicious circle because the above mentioned conditions determine women to enter more and more the labour market, but they hardly have the opportunity of receiving good jobs, which is a negative factor for their subsequent quality of life and their subsequent choices. They are determined to get more involved in educational programmes, but they face educational segregation, leading to labour market segregation. Sweden experiences the same level of educational and labour market segregation. The same phenomena encountered in two different cultures leads to the conclusion that this could be a problem at the global level.

Romanian women also postpone having children. Sometimes they give up education for work, to support themselves or their families. They rely more and more on their partners, but also on the state, creating a particular new “male breadwinner” model. The prevalence of work as a source of welfare entitlement made labour market part more compulsory for women in Romania than in Sweden, but because of certain characteristics and the mentality of the people, men are still the uncontested heads of almost every family.

Sweden was used as term for comparison, because of the role played by the Social Democracy for the last decades and the strengthening position of women on the labour market and, generally speaking, in civil, social and political actions.

As interesting details have been discussed, I have also emphasized the major role the globalisation process played during the last years. In Sweden, economic globalisation was the one having the main part; through employers’ actions, there has been inducted a tent of neo-liberalism to the welfare state and the way of thinking when taking decisions, which affected women to a certain extent, but the strong history of the Social Democratic regime attenuated the effects. In Romania, the FMI and the WB have had the main part, making political globalisation act as major determinant; furthermore, Social Democracy has known a time of political very weak activity during the Communist regime and it has practically started all over again as from 1989 Revolution, but with the impediment of being forced to face the destructive effects of the dictatorship and the very tough impact of the openness of frontiers. However, the situation is changing, even if slowly. A shift is expected during the years to come. The question that still has no answer yet is when and what will produce the determinant shift in the Romanian society towards what it is called as a developed country. Is it the join of the European Union? Some think so. But only time will tell.
References:


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