

Possibility of Knowledge Sharing Between the 'Old' and the 'New' Social Movements. Sociological Reflections Based on Qualitative Research in Silesia

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Abstract

The paper presents similarities and differences in the perception of women's problems on the present Polish labour market by leaders of old and new social movements (i.e., trade unions and women's organisations respectively). Based on the qualitative research conducted in 2010–2011 in Silesia, the paper focuses on the issue of mutual perception of union leaders in trade industry and female leaders in women's organisations. It also analyses factors facilitating the integration of the both movements and their actual cooperation so far and emphasises the potential of their synergic cooperation.

Key words: trade unions, NGOs, social movements, labour market, women's organisations

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Introduction

Integration problems of the 'old' and the 'new' social movements are related to their functioning in the post-industrial society determined by particular indicators of knowledge used as a strategic resource for contemporary planning and achieving intended objectives. What should be noted is the increasing role of factual knowledge in the form of human resources and social capital facilitating exchange of experience and building confidence. However, current research indicates that, unlike human resources, the increase in social capital in Poland encounters a number of obstacles (Czapiński 2009). Still, there is some optimism in the outlook on the condition of the Polish social capital. This can be observed in the renaissance of women's organisations after 1989. Therefore, it can be said that currently in Poland 'the old' social movements undergoing a downward trend coexist with the 'new' (i.e., women's organisations and initiatives) undergoing an upward trend. According to Claus Offe (2005), these two movements contribute to formulating old and new paradigms of activity, which illustrates crossing borders of stiff institutional policy.

The 'old' social movements are characterised by certain types of activity and they refer to the need of safety and economic stability i.e., to the needs regarded as those of minor importance. The 'new' social movements are assumed to be less formalised, deliberately more spontaneous and they mostly refer to the needs of higher priority related to the questions of subjectivity and individual autonomy. In the case of women's movements it can be assumed that both in Poland and worldwide they are established by women with increased awareness of their position as well as educated women mostly from middle-class backgrounds (Ślęczka 1999; Malinowska 2002). Thus, perhaps, due to membership composition in the women's organisations, women raised mainly questions concerning equal voting rights and women's cultural autonomy paying less attention (at least in the second half of 20th century) to the issue of women as subjects of exploitation on the labour market. The issue of interests and orientation within women's movement is generally diversified, complex, historically and situationally determined and related to the issues of adopted ideological attitudes. Consequently, it is difficult to make any broader generalisations. However, Joanna Erbel (2008) in her publications about the Polish women's movement after 1898 emphasises its transformations from the issues initially related mostly to dealing with criticism of culture to dealing with employees' and trade union rights.

The aim of this study is to present similarities and differences in the perception of women's problems on the current labour market in Poland. Another discussed issue is mutual perception of male union leaders in the trade sector and female leaders in women's organisations seen as a factor facilitating integration and synergic cooperation. The study is based on empirical qualitative research conducted in 2010–2011 in Silesia, which constitutes the space and time framework for the research.

Women's Organisations and Trade Unions – Methodological Issues

Qualitative research allows for bringing into focus adopted attitudes and ways of defining the social reality by research participants, due to which some practices can be 'made visible' but could easily pass unnoticed in quantitative analyses (Denzin, Lincoln, Yvonna 2009). One of the most common techniques used in qualitative research are free interviews. However, its popularity does not mean ease of its application. Steinar Kvale (2010) while listing advantages of the interview technique mentions gaining an exceptional insight into the life and world of the research participants as well as easiness of avoiding traps connected with imposing researcher's hidden assumptions on research participants, which can significantly contribute to creating new knowledge of human life. However, conducting free interviews requires a good preparation connected not only with this research technique, but also some basic subject knowledge of the researched area. Interviews with female trade union leaders in this research were conducted by carefully prepared sociology students in the course of the research grant, whereas interviews with female leaders of women's organisations were conducted exclusively by female students in the course of their internship. Each time I personally coordinated the work of both groups of students and I conducted a few interviews myself. The sampling was in both cases deliberate because, on the one hand, I wanted to reach female leaders of women's organisations, and, on the other hand, female and male trade union leaders in the trade sector in hypermarkets belonging to two international corporations operating in Silesia. I designed both parts of the research in the way due to which their results would provide comparable data on mutual attitudes, distances or antagonisms, and, also in the a way which would show the way of perceiving problems in women functioning on the labour market.

Each time in the course of respondents selection male and female students conducting interviews established contacts with leaders managing a particular women's organisation or trade union and then through the direct appointing the person they established contact with the pointed second person that was regarded as a male leader or a female leader of the analysed organisation. In terms of the purpose and scope, the research is assumed not to be representative of all trade unions operating in trade section or women's organisations and initiatives in Silesia, which in the case of the latter is impossible to perform due to their spontaneous and not always formalised character.

I made the selection of women's organisations participating in the research based on data in *Informator o organizacjach i inicjatywach w Polsce* [Bulletin on women's organisations and initiatives] (2005). This way female leaders of women's organisations and initiatives in Silesia focused on supporting women on the labour market were chosen. Among others the following organisations participated in the research: Demokratyczna Unia Kobiet [Democratic Union of Women], Dąbrowskie Stowarzyszenie Rodzin w Kryzysie [Dabrowa Association of Families in Crisis], Liga Kobiet Polskich [Polish Women's League], Stowarzyszenie im. Marii Niepokalanej na Rzecz Pomocy Dziewczętom i Kobietom [St. Mary's Association for Helping Girls and Women], Zabrzeńskie Stowarzyszenie Kobiet i ich Rodzin [Association of Women and their Families in Zabrze], Stowarzyszenie Aktywne Kobiety [Active Women Association], Grupa Inicjatyw Genderowych [Gender Initiatives Group]. Besides, I decided to contact well-known participants of women's movements in Silesia whose activities are commonly known and described in feminist press although they are mainly involved in the activities of informal women's groups: Małgorzata Tkacz-Janik, Aleksandra Banot, Małgorzata Jończy-Adamska, Katarzyna Tobór-Osadnik and Elżbieta Wiener. From my research sample I deliberately excluded one of the activists who supported women's movement but was not involved in the movement but was formally involved in one of the trade unions. After the selection of respondents, 34 free interviews were conducted.

Age range within the women's organisations participating in the research was varied but participants aged over 40 accounted for majority since there were 10 participants aged 50–59, 9 participants aged 40–49, 6 participants aged over 60, 9 participants were aged under 40 which included 8 participants aged 30–39 and 1 was less than 29. There was a marked dominance of participants with higher education with least bachelor's degree as 17 participants had master's degree, 6 bachelor's degree and 2 participants had PhD degree. Only 9 participants did not complete higher education: 6 respondents completed secondary education and 3 completed vocational

education. Despite social involvement in social problems, the majority of participants were not involved in trade union activity. Only 11 respondents were members of one of trade unions and as many as 23 of them were not. 22 respondents were married, 8 were single, two were widows, 1 woman was a divorcee, and 1 woman was in a separation. As for children, 7 did not have any children, 13 had 2 children and 3 had 3 or more children.

Conducting interviews with male and female leaders in trade section in Silesia was possible because I managed to receive unions' approval and start cooperation with the biggest and most representative trade union centres in Poland such as: Niezależny Związek Zawodowy Solidarność [Solidarity], Ogólnopolskie Porozumienie Związków Zawodowych [The All Poland Alliance of Trade Unions] and Forum Związków Zawodowych [Trade Unions Forum]. The research presented here accounts for the part of a bigger research project under my direction that is related to the perception of female employee's problems by male and female trade union leaders in the most and least feminised sectors¹. In this brief study, I only analyse the perception of male trade union leaders in the trade sector and I deal only with the basic female employees' problems and perception of women's organisations and possibility of cooperating with them.

As for the discussed perception of employees' problems in the large-space trading, I think it is worth noting that these workplaces are relatively new. The networks of hypermarkets analysed in this research were established after 1989 and then were of common interest as they were seen as a symbol of affluence after many years of socialist shortage economy. The Foundation of hypermarkets created hopes of potential employees due to their attractive situation in shopping centres or modern management methods related to them. Initially the need for trade unions functioning in these modern workplaces was regarded as a whim, but relatively soon reality and opinions of the National Labour Inspectorate questioned this view (Ost 2007; Czarzasty 2010). I even think that after a decade since the establishment of first hypermarkets belonging to international corporations they started to become a symbol of employees' exploitation in a capitalist market economy and relationships between employers and employees became particularly asymmetrical and attempts to establish trade unions encountered a number of difficulties (Ostrowski 2009). In this situation conducting sociological interviews was a challenging task as certain

¹ This is research financed from the science funds in 2010–2011 as a research project Attitudes Male and female trade unionists towards the issues of gender equality and possibilities of women's self-realisation in professional life and trade union movement in the period after 1989.

lack of trust, fears of trade union leaders had to be overcome to obtain their consent for research. However, this problem was solved with the assistance of trade union centres. Therefore, interviews were conducted with the maximum care in order to guarantee the respondents their anonymity. Also, appointments with leaders were held in places chosen by them, frequently situated far from their workplace because respondents feared of being monitored by CCTV or being more carefully observed or 'invigilated' by those with a hostile attitude to them for instance, people with a servile attitude towards negatively oriented managing staff.

As a result, we managed to conduct 14 free in-depth interviews for the needs of the research. Apart from the basic questions, the interviewers asked questions related to the issues providing additional information for the research, that emerged in the course of the conducted interviews. The interviews were conducted with 12 women and 2 men. As for the respondents age range, the group consisted of 6 respondents aged 40–49, 4 respondents were aged 30–39, 2 respondents were aged 20–29 and 2 respondents were aged 50–59. As for the seniority of trade unionists, 3 respondents worked longer than 25 years, 4 respondents worked from 6 to 10 years, for 3 of them the period ranged from 21 to 25, for 2 respondents the range was 11–15 years and for 2 range was 1–5 years. Respondents with secondary education dominated in the group (9), 3 had higher vocational education and 2 had vocational education. Another characteristic of the group was a varied marital status of the trade union leaders: 6 married, 4 single, 1 widowed and 3 divorced. 2 respondents had 1 child, 6 had 2 children, 2 had 3 or more children and 4 had no children. 2 of the female union leaders were members of non-governmental women's organisation, one of them was a member of Active Women's Association, and the other member did not reveal the name of the organisation.

Due to explorative nature of these analyses in further considerations, I do not refer to statistical data. What I was searching for in this research was the way of perception and definition of women's problems on the labour market and perception of prospective allies in the views of male and female union leaders in both movements. Statements made by the respondents quoted in this study are direct and they were not edited in any way.

Women on the Labour Market in the Eyes of Male Trade Unionists and Female Leaders of Women's Organisations

In comparison with men, women entered differently the labour market and they still have been functioning there in a different way. Sociological analyses of women's situation systematically indicate their lower professional activity, higher unemployment rates in all age ranges, lower remuneration, less promotion prospects (Lisowska 2008; Mazur-Łuczak). Professional activity in Poland in the fourth quarter of the year in 2010 reached the level of 48.2% for women and 64.3% for men (Rocznik Statystyczny 2011: 218). The women's unemployment rate as of the transition of 1989 has been higher, in the fourth quarter of the year in 2010 it accounted for 9.9% while for men it was 8.8% (Rocznik Statystyczny 2011: 238). Women's average gross remuneration is lower and according to the Central Statistical Office in 2010, it was PLN 3256.06 while for men it was PLN 3831.73 (Rocznik Statystyczny 2011: 255). The women's problems connected with getting promoted to higher positions in economic or political organisations are typical of the whole European Union and in sociological analyses they are referred to as glass ceiling. This metaphor refers to the possibility of self-realisation and getting to top positions in theory but in reality, it proves unachievable. In the Polish literature on the subject this phenomenon was extensively analysed and contributed to elaborating the ways of counteracting it through applying for parity or quota system on the electoral lists in parliamentary elections. In reality, assurance of the quota system i.e. obligation of 35% women's representation on the electoral lists of all political parties participating in parliamentary elections in Poland does not guarantee women the possibility of being elected. However, in the present Polish parliament women account for 24%, which sets a record since the transformation of 1989. The quota system itself without obligatory alternativeness of gender on the electoral lists does not meet its expectations. The quota system in Poland was introduced due to initiatives of the Women's Congress, which, however, failed to implement drafting electoral lists with alternative order of candidates in terms of gender. Therefore, it was only a partial success.

Female leaders of women's organisations participating in the research were asked about their views on the **reasons of lower women's activity on the labour market.**

The reasons given by the respondents can be grouped in the following categories of problems:

- problems related to coping with professional and family life since still one sex bears the responsibility for rearing children,
- problems with finding and maintaining the employment, as women are still treated as 'spare army of employees' so they are offered a job or they are made redundant depending on economic situation,
- women's passivity which is acquired in the course of their socialisation directing their interests to private, not professional or life and
- women's lack of will to undertake professional work if they have any other alternative way of financial support, which creates a specific 'reply' indicating that their main responsibility is the one connected with household functioning.

Categories of the given reasons for the lower professional activity often overlapped and the respondents did emphasise their cumulative character. Their statements usually started with the issue well known in the literature on the subject related to contradictory character of family and professional roles and stressed the fact of overstated expectations towards women. Due to the limitations of this research, I decided to quote only one statement strongly emphasising contradictory character of women's roles. One of the respondents says:

We had some different professional projects for women where in the project we took care of children, that was one of the form of support, then when the project was over, they were looking for a job, they couldn't leave children, they brought these children here to take care of them as they can't do anything about it. Err, there were too many places for kids in kindergartens or kindergartens were open there only till 3p.m. and, well... also women can't work shifts as they have to look after children as it is only women's duty. I think that here, the lack of men's involvement in upbringing children causes that women have a much lower position on the professional job market ... By all means, women want to work but they have no possibility because they have too many various household duties. They are overloaded. But, err,... well... I know only few women who don't want to work. Each woman would like to be independent, have her own money, err... decide about her holidays and expenses. Well, it's not that... Just like that. Sure, for sure it's good to try to increase women's activity but through guaranteeing women conditions which will make it possible as it's not the point to blame anyone who does not work. This person doesn't work as..., as there's no such a possibility or ... such a person has no such expectations. Some women stay at home, stay at home with children to only/

or as much as possible take care of home, but it's also because many people were brought up like that, though it's changing. I think that each woman would rather work. (R.7)²

The above statement indicates a commonly known problem of the wrong functioning of the *pro-family* policy, which, in fact, does not fulfil its role. One of these problems is the lack of cheap and satisfactory childcare in nurseries and kindergartens. In the case of older children, there is a lack of after-school care facilities or in the case of secondary education: lack of interest groups and protection against potential forms of violence also experienced from peers related to this age group. This way the women who decide to focus on rearing children in the first stages of their lives can easily be trapped and eliminated from the labour market due to the necessity of taking care of already much older children. The issue of family and household duties had been marginalised in sociological considerations for a long time but the recent research conducted by Anna Titkow, Danuta Duch-Krzysztozek and Bogusława Budrowska (2004) show that it is still predominantly the problem of women as they bear main responsibility and burden in this area. It is worth noting that in Poland after the time devoted to taking care of young children who finally become independent, women encounter another problem i.e., taking care of elderly dependent family members. Thus, in this context, as the respondents say, the question is why women's activity is so *high* not so *low* ...

Particular attention should be drawn to the issue of **perception of the whole women's situation on the professional job market**. In this area, the female leaders of women's organisations distinguished the following categories of problems:

- Lack of women's work continuity related to their role in the reproduction process, which causes problems with finding and remaining in employment,
- Opportunities and traps related to flexible forms of employment for women, which on the one hand, enable any work and, on the other hand, lead to worse working conditions and forms of employment, lack of promotion prospects and lower remuneration,
- Entering jobs in the grey zone: in the area of care, cleaning or these illegal jobs

² Letter R with a number refers to an interviewee and later in the article these symbols are used at the end of each quotation in each quoted statement and there are different symbols for trade union leaders and women's organisations (i.e., each time numbers start with R1).

- Negative stereotypes of women which make their functioning on the labour difficult in a number of aspects: getting promoted, recruitment, or participation in employee training,
- Low remuneration, which causes difficulties with supporting oneself independently

Due to the research, limitations I decided to focus in more depth on the two above mentioned categories i.e., lack of women's work continuity and entering the grey zone. As for the lack of women's work continuity, literature on the subject shows that there is a common conflict between production and reproduction (Reszke 1991). One of the respondents describes this situation as follows:

Keeping a job after returning from a maternity leave apparently isn't that easy and I know it from my own experience though I didn't have such problems as I somehow managed to go through it without bigger problems. Employers very often don't wait for a return of a young mother-employee. Very often, the employer hires a new employee in the mother's place. So there's no place for her to come back to after the leave. But the employer is not always a problem. For some time, some tendency has been observed in the case of women, especially the young ones, who find out about problems at work or if they knew that that they were just about to lose their jobs, they deliberately got pregnant and immediately took a sick leave despite the lack of contra-indications. And all this they do not lose a job. So it can be seen that there is more than one guilty party but both of them are somewhat guilty. There must be some kind of solution but since women behave this way, employers don't want to employ women, young women, to be more precise. (R. 17)

As the above statement suggests, a specific game of employers and female employees can be observed in the process of reproduction, it is a game in which more and less fair strategies using the rights resulting from the labour code. The whole game is related to the women's situation on the labour market including the fact of their '**disappearance from the professional job market**'. From this perspective, children are treated as a women's problem although it is a question of delivering new members of society, which is a process significant to the whole economy. Women's work discontinuity in the form of maternity leave or childcare leave is on the one hand, understandable and guaranteed on the Labour Law. However, in reality it is subject to abuse, particularly on the part of employers and managing staff. In their case, it is their reaction to the fears of increasing their labour costs. Currently, Poland faces two major problems: ageing society and total fertility rate (TFR) at the level of 1.382 (Rocznik Statystyczny 2011: 194). The low TFR and aging society pose

a problem for the economy development, of but so far in Poland no effective incentives for women to have more children have been created. Women, however, unwilling to have more children show in this way that they are not interested bearing personal costs connected with the loss of attractive work positions, opportunities of self-realisation or being eliminated from the market. Besides, in my view, the low TFR indicators suggest that it is not possible to guarantee an increase in the reproduction through the ban on legal abortion, which despite protests of women's organisations and movements (Chelstowska 2009) is still in force.

Entering the grey zone can be seen as a reaction to drawbacks of the legally offered workplaces. Thus this problem, as it were, has been always present, which is illustrated by a statement of one of the respondents:

Well, I have sort of two pictures about this issue as on the one hand, there is a picture of the woman who has no job but has a family and she 'goes to the street'. Here, in her view, she does this 'job' to support her family. And the moment we take her off this way and she starts a normal professional activity, then further activities, emotions or situations appear in which she may feel she can't cope and is being taken advantage of in a different way. As they 'go into the street; on the one hand, they do it against themselves but they know they have to do it for their family. Sometimes they think they will do 'it' for a year or two and then they will stop and start a small shop and be a good mother and wife. This is, however, only imagination, as it is very difficult to quit prostitution. But when they quit it, and start a professional activity, it's hard for them to combine it with being a wife and a mother as the labour market today is difficult so even if you get the job, the woman is being taken advantage of e.g., 12-hour non-stop shifts, the question is still pending: what about the kids? (R. 14)

As can be seen from the respondent's statement, employment in the grey zone can be not only related to illegal employment of housewives, cleaning and cooking help, childminders and persons taking care of the elderly or the disabled, but also to prostitution. This is related to the way of defining work so: do housewives or cooks work professionally? Can prostitution be regarded as work? Literature on the subject offers a number of definitions of 'work' but in the mainstream, it is emphasised that the notion of *work* refers only to activity which is purposeful, deliberate, conscious, utilitarian and connected with fulfilling people's needs and providing financial support that is socially significant and indicates a social position. Thus occupations such as procurer, thief or prostitute are excluded (Król, Ludwiczynski 2007).

Nevertheless, these paid occupations provide financial support for an individual person and sometimes for his /her family. In the view of female leaders of women's organisations, this issue should not be neglected.

Male trade union activists in the feminised trade sector were asked about their employees' problems and issues related to women's functioning on the labour market. Apart from the **basic employees' problems in the trade sector**, the respondents distinguished the following categories of problems:

- Low remuneration and unfavourable working conditions including even problems with obtaining unemployment benefit,
- Difficulties with returning from childcare leave to more attractive positions at work,
- Problems related to combining professional and parental roles including the issues of organisation of Sunday free time activities for children and spending holidays together,
- Lack of professionalism of management which can generate mobbing,
- Discrimination caused by participation in trade union activity and problems with establishing trade unions.

Due to limitation imposed on the scope of analyses, I would like to emphasise and focus mainly on the issue of low remuneration, unfavourable employment conditions and participation in trade union activity. The issue of the **low remuneration and unfavourable employment conditions** is well illustrated by the following statement:

Basic, first of all, very, very, very low salary as usual which equals the lowest state average salary. I guess around 70%–80% of the staff, part-time jobs, as it is a rather monotonous and hard job like putting the stock on shelves or butchering is a really hard physical job... and the cashiers usually work part-time, usually $\frac{3}{4}$ or $\frac{1}{2}$ of full-time working time amount (R. 10).

Doing professional work is usually conditioned by the necessity of acquiring means to cover living expenses of an individual person and often his/her family including children. With an increasing number of single-parent families, mostly women (Duch-Krzysztożek 1998) the significance of sources of income becomes even higher. Low remuneration in the trade sector decreases even more through 'untypical employment forms' which according to this research, proved to be quite common, particularly part-time jobs. Another factor illustrating how low is remuneration in the trade sector is the possibility of receiving an unemployment benefit in the event of job loss. It turns out that under Polish law an unemployed person is entitled to the unemployment benefit if s/he fulfils a number of conditions, including the one

that stipulates that this person is obliged to prove that within 18 months prior to unemployment registration in the Labour Office s/he had worked for the period of minimum 365 days, and within this period received at least the lowest remuneration which required allotment of contribution for the Labour Fund (Act of 20th April 2004, art. 71). However, there is a possibility to work part-time in a hypermarket for a few years, and without taking on additional working hours to reach the amount of time needed for full-time employment required to receive a minimum amount of the unemployment benefit. Such circumstances do not guarantee financial security for employees in the event of job loss and they point at some controversy connected with part-time employment. This type of employment particularly concerns women in the trade sector. However, it was not limited only to this sector, therefore there is a wider problem defined as the poverty feminisation (Desperak, Rek-Woźniak 2009). Female leaders participating in the research were also asked if they felt discriminated against because of sex. The answer was negative, the leaders indicated that the problem of low remuneration refers to all employees, in particular those employed part-time. The respondents, however, did not mention the fact that women accounted for the majority of employees in a more difficult situation. Thus, it can be assumed that discrimination because of sex is usually associated with differences in direct treatment of women and men, rather than their more difficult structural situation.

In the context of low salaries and frequently unfavourable working conditions, trade unions occupy a more important role and, at the same time, there is a range of **problems related to the discrimination**. This issue is suggestively illustrated by the following statement:

Now, there is also such pressure as in some supermarkets an employer says: you can apply to be a manager or to take part in the individual trainings but you must leave trade unions i.e., our trade unions. There is pressure to dissolve unions, especially those that seem to be inconvenient to employers, isn't there? ... I was in a union in Bielsko where they clearly said that if you belong to a union, you don't work overtime, you don't get extra hours, you don't do it, you won't earn extra money, you don't need it because you pay a membership fee so some people working there left the union just because they had families which they had to support. (R. 6)

As it can be noted in this characteristic statement, trade unionists claim that they are treated worse by employers and managers acting on their behalf and consequently they have a limited access to trainings, promotion or working overtime or higher remuneration in the situations when they expect it. On the other hand,

this research, like the one previously conducted by Piotr Ostrowski (2009), indicate, that appearance of trade unions in hypermarkets contributes to better compliance with work safety and hygiene regulations therefore it has a positive influence on performing work duties by employees. Piotr Ostrowski (2009) in his collective case study proved that changes caused by the formation of trade unions lead to more symmetrical relationships between employees and employers and suggestively showed difficulties connected with trade unions formation, which is also proved by the analyses in this research. Nevertheless, **I think that this research also indicates that the difficulties with trade unions formation in trade sector are also connected with the fact that women outnumber there.** Diversity resulting from gender means that women are socialised to be more humble and less focused on public activity, which is additionally determined by historical traditions. That means that trade union formation is for them a kind of double challenge. Therefore, I think that the discriminating situation consists of two aspects: on the one hand, sex and trade union activity on the other. Organisation of trade union activity by female leaders in one of the Silesian hypermarkets and organising a strike action that was widely present in media caused a change in the image of a trade union activist that was associated with the man.

In addition, I think it should be emphasised that respondents mentioned all-employees problem of combining parental and family duties, in particular those connected with working on Sundays and public holidays. The following statement illustrates this:

We would like the shorter opening hours on these days I mean holidays and days preceding them, for example Christmas Eve or Easter Saturday because if we work till 6 p.m. on Christmas Eve, what can I do on Christmas Eve after closing the shop? Nothing, really ... At 6 p.m. we let in the last customer and that doesn't mean we go home then (R. 5)

Difficulty of combining the roles and work on public holidays is, on the one hand, seen as an all-employee problem and, on the other hand, it particularly affects women since they traditionally bear the responsibility for the kind of leisure on Sundays or holidays. **This example clearly shows how all-employee issues are interwoven with issues strictly connected with women's professional activity.** This problem is even more stressed in the campaign launched by NSZZ 'Solidarność' (Solidarity) as well as the campaign in 2012 against Sunday working where social advertisements addressed the issue concerning mothers' lack of time for spending Sundays with their children

(which was illustrated by slogans such as, for example: *'It's Sunday today, and mum is at work again, God grant that my mom may be with me on Sunday'*). This also shows how the Polish society differs in their religious declarations according to which *the holy day is to be kept holy* and, on the other hand, the actual behaviour and doing shopping on Sunday. Thus, this issue shows complexity of social life and the need to raise awareness of combining different interests.

As far as women's employment problems are concerned, respondents stressed that they perceive the problem from the perspective of their own sector so the problems partially overlap with the previously discussed employment issues. Among new employment problems characteristic of women's problems the respondents listed:

- Working conditions which are particularly dangerous to women's health,
- Issues connected with fair remuneration that are sufficient for a decent standard of living, women's remuneration is lower as men are offered opportunities to receive higher remuneration,
- Problems with keeping the attractive job positions after returning to work from child care leave,
- Bigger difficulties connected with finding and keeping a job in comparison with men,
- Risk of sexual abuse.

While briefly commenting on these problems, I think it is worthwhile to draw attention to unsafe working conditions harmful to women's health and still embarrassing issue of sexual abuse. The opinion presented below illustrates the question of non-compliance with work safety and hygiene regulations, which causes hazards to women's health:

Well, the women here lift a lot, so hard. Much beyond their physical possibility, to put it simply, according to safety regulations, they can't never ever do it. When the National Labour Inspectorate come, then automatically all the pallets are moved to the yard, and then women carry just single cartons. But when the Inspection isn't there, girls pull the pallets with tonnes of goods. There are many problems with backbones. We want to qualify it as professional diseases, young mothers miscarry, they simply can't carry a pregnancy to term and it really becomes a problem and we start to deal with it, I don't like at all as it is growing in everybody, such a ... (R. 4)

As the above statement indicates employers and managing staff acting on their behalf are regarded as the party, which sets conditions. They frequently do not comply with work safety and hygiene regulations guaranteed by law and in the

company's life there are two kinds of streams official and the hidden one. This results in individual strategies, which in the case of women may even lead to miscarriage as well as common strategies connected with organisation of 'common resistance. The respondents, however, sometimes stress that non-compliance with work safety regulations is also a motivator for trade union formation and for functioning of social labour inspections. As the respondents' statements indicate, in the long run formation of trade unions has a positive influence on managers because even if they do not belong to unions, due to the existence of unions, they become more interested in observing the law and in addition, they get protection from other people holding higher positions. Research participants also stressed that causes of women's problems on the labour market frequently overlap. Shortage of job offers causes that women are 'doomed' to feminised sectors, which is connected with low salaries or necessity of submitting to bigger pressure on the part of management and exceptionally unfavourable working or employment conditions.

The issue of sexual abuse is illustrated by the following statement:

Once I had a 'pleasure' of being abused by my manager and that was very unpleasant. When I made it clear that I don't want it, he threatened that I would be given an official reprimand. But this man quickly left the shop so... This was typical as I was a woman. I'm more affected by the fact that I am a union activist than the fact that I'm a woman. (R. 10)

This statement shows the possibility of being double endangered by oppression, because of sex and participation in trade union. As respondents' statements show that women are particularly subjected to sexual abuse. Women's physical attractiveness or the fact of doing professional work are in this context interpreted as their sexual availability, which in reality means taking advantage of differences in hierarchical situation and using different kinds of pressure ranging from subtle implications to direct proposals offering supervisor's 'protection' in exchange for sexual services. The respondents' statements showed only examples of heterosexual abuse where an aggressor at a higher position oppressed a woman.

On the basis of the conducted research, it can be seen that perception of the women's problems on the labour market differs for female leaders of women's organisations and male union leaders in the trade sector. If these two perspectives are juxtaposed, the issue of women's problems on the labour market becomes more diversified and thus richer. Moreover, it can be clearly seen that there is some common ground showing the concern with women's situation. However, the question is if

these groups can share the picture of this situation and cooperate in implementing changes. This question served as the basis for the analyses conducted in this research. Therefore, in the interviews the respondents were asked about their mutual attitudes. This showed that majority of male union leaders have a very little knowledge of non-governmental women's organisations as they were rather associated with other women-dominated trade unions like Związek Nauczycielstwa Polskiego [Polish Teachers' Union], Sekcja Kobiet NSZZ 'Solidarność' [Women's Division in Solidarity trade union] and politically-oriented Partia Kobiet [Women's Party]. Among the actually functioning women's organisations, only the following ones were mentioned: Liga Kobiet Polskich [the Polish Women's League], Stowarzyszenie Aktywne Kobiety [Active Women's Association], Koalicja Karat [Karat Coalition] and Kongres Kobiet [The Congress of Women]. Some respondents even said that they could not name any women's organisations or associations though they are aware of their existence and activity. The level of interest in women's movement and its knowledge seems to be rather limited.

Male union leaders were also asked also about their **associations with the word feminism**. The distribution of answers to this question showed a wide diversity of views ranging from negative or ambivalent to neutral and positive. This is illustrated by the following statement:

Well, often it is such picking on, ok, women say, why doesn't a guy look after a child but after himself? But he will say, ok, I look after the kid and you go and repair a car so we shouldn't go to extremes, I think that woman should simply talk to man and try to get some agreement. And that's it. (R. 7)

Once I had already been interviewed and I said that actually we, all women are feminists, now it's not the time when feminists were associated with women wearing trousers with a cigarette or coffee in their hands like the man. No, now a feminist is a woman who can fight for her rights who isn't only a typical housewife who... I think it's a woman who has some kind of partnership at home with her partner. I don't associate feminism with the fact that I have to work until I'm 67 or so, for me it's sick, the woman should work shorter firstly, because she's a woman and secondly, she gives birth to children and brings them up and also works at home, too, ain't it? I'm not a radical feminist, for me radical feminism is simply something I don't understand, however, I know radical feminists, they are nice to talk to and get along with. (R. 6)

It can be observed that in the statements with positive connotations related to the word *feminism* there are a number of very positive opinions going as far as identification with participation in this movement. There are also clear-cut reservations about some wings of feminism or interests in which women are particularly interested, which indicates the unwillingness to retirement at the age of 67 or low remuneration. Statements including negative associations with the word feminism are connected with its stereotypical picture i.e., hatred of men, sexual demoralisation, lack of respect for lasting family, or some kind of women's whim or general dislike of this term that the respondents find difficult to justify. They also emphasised that informal terms like 'feminist' or 'blonde' have rather negative connotations and tend to be used for lowering the value of a person who is called this way. In this context, male union leaders stressed that they are against such stereotypes and both positive and negative sides of women's activities should be considered.

Female leaders of women's organisations were asked about participation in the union movement and their attitude to its activity. Opinions of both female union leaders and male union leaders on the scope of trade union activity were also diversified with regard to their valuation of feminism. Therefore, the whole spectrum of opinions was observed, ranging from positive to negative. The following statements illustrate two markedly different perspectives:

As for my experiences in those days, I think that trade unions don't help women. ... I even think that many decisions were taken behind women's backs, for example moving to another work position and women learnt about it only later and it was men who took decisions as men are usually in union authorities and they took decisions ... And this moving to a lower position ..., surely lower ... By far it's been the same, nothing has changed, it's the same and, I believe that some common sense is needed here. (R. 25)

I'm not much of an expert on trade unions but I happen to know some women in mining and trade unions in Tesco, this has changed my views on trade unions that I had somehow at the back of my head, still connected somehow with Solidarity and stereotypical thinking of them and regarding them as some fossilised structure. Many people take problems into their own hands, and that would be great if unions could represent everybody, not only some people, as unfortunately, it was the case, that was my impression. That's why such women's trade unions are formed. It is justified in these feminised jobs. On the other hand, women see that there's

something wrong and they start to take care themselves of their own needs, and this, by all means, I support and I think they can do a lot. (R. 2)

As the quoted statements suggest the negative valuation of trade union activities is related to attribution of androcentrism to them and even defining them as 'male unions' concerned only with interests of only one sex or, at least marginalising women's employee problems. Therefore, the female respondents stress the fact that trade unions are dominated by men's participation and women there are less numerous and secondary to men in terms of care and attention paid to them because their interests are not articulated or defended. It can be assumed that in these negative opinions of trade unions, the male unionist is usually associated with the man fighting for other employees i.e., men. Positive statements concerning trade unions stress their achievements and all-employee representation thus also women's employees' interests. Within this category of statement women are seen as creative and active union members who even cooperate with women's organisations including the Congress of Women.

Female leaders of organisations were also asked if they can see any common **ground for activities of the women's movement and trade unions**. The obtained categories of statements can generally be divided into those **confirming** the existence of common ground for some areas of activities or **refraining** from statements with regard to this issue. Even the most negative attitude to trade unions did not entail negation of common ground for some activities. However, the female respondents admitted to some extent that they did not have sufficient knowledge of trade unions so it was difficult for them to express any opinions on that matter. Sometimes they also added that so far they had not taken into consideration a possibility of such cooperation and admitted that perhaps would be worth considering.

In the categories **confirming** common ground for interest areas of women's organisations and trade unions, the following statement can be quoted:

Absolutely, absolutely. I think that it's a very good combination. All kinds of associations, trade unions. Meetings of trade unions and women's organisations at such forums and conferences is good as they cause that the problems not noticed so far become noticed... In addition, trade unions are very powerful, much bigger than women's organisations. Trade unions have the power of trade unions ... They are capable of using economic factors in order to provoke some behaviours. Which means that they're much stronger than participation in demos (called manifas) or other demonstrations, aren't they? That means that if there is a strike action

concerned with the improvement of women's situation, then it will be organised and will have financial consequences, which simply means that employer is bound to notice it. S/he won't listen to petitions. Trade unions have the power which women's organisations don't have. Therefore their cooperation can cause concrete actions. But the question is, whether unions' authorities will be interested in it As it isn't very popular. (R. 34)

The female leaders of women's organisations also recognise possibilities of increasing together the power and creating a civil community which would enable to work out socially advantageous solutions. As well as this, they stressed the power and experience of trade unions. While indicating their significance they emphasise direct presence of trade unions in workplaces, knowledge of particular employee problems, some institutionally guaranteed resources and access to legal support. The women's organisations themselves claim that their 'contribution' to cooperation with trade unions is the possibility of increasing membership in unions and the improvement of the organisations image as lively modern organisations, not some old-fashioned organisation. Some respondents also pointed out **that there is already some kind of cooperation of the two movements, which is expressed through their common presence at conferences, trainings, congresses or women's manifestations** (*manifas*). What is worth mentioning are different resources used by unions and women's organisations. The latter frequently uses provocation or happenings. Such a provocative manner is also characteristic of women's actions, widely covered by media, in the form of *manifas* i.e., demonstrations on women's days on March 8th. In 2010 and 2011 the *manifas* held in Polish towns and cities were devoted to the women's situation on the labour market. The motto of the 2010 *manifa* held in Warsaw was 'Solidarity in the Crisis, Solidarity in the Struggle' and the next year it was 'Enough of Exploitation! We give notice' and the following trade unions were then present at the *manifas*: OZZPiP, OPZZ, WZZ Sierpień 80 and ZNP (Polish Teachers' Union)³. The motto for the *manifa* held in Silesia was *Power of Diversity. Women inspire!* However, there were some problems with attendance in the Silesian *manifas* since, on the one hand, socially they were becoming clearer and more acceptable but, on the other hand, devoting time to *manifas* and the moral courage were regarded as the stigma of the feminist, which did not encourage people to participate in them.

I think that what is worth noting is the left-wing character of majority of women's organisations. That facilitates their cooperation with OPZZ as opposed

³ <http://manifa.org/>

to the cooperation with NSZZ Solidarność referring to the Christian values which are sometimes strongly emphasised. The Congress of Women worked out certain ideological neutrality and cooperation in 2009 during the celebrations of 20th anniversary of the Polish transformation. All representative trade unions and other smaller unions concerned with women's problems met there. Thus, as can be seen, there are ideological barriers in the cooperation of the women's movements and trade unions, although in both movements there are organisations referring both to lay and religious values. Other barriers in the cooperation of trade unions and women's movement are related to the fact that the latter consists predominantly of women with middle-class background. That means that their economic situation is relatively well-secured and that can decrease their motivation to cope with burning issues of the trade unions or lower classes including the precarity.

Final remarks

The comparison of women organisations and trade unions generally suggests that the perception of women's problems on the labour market is partially diversified and partially overlapped. As the research indicates, the representatives of the both movements, despite the same spectre of problems, do not know much of each other and neither do they share systemically their knowledge or experience although their potential integration might contribute to synergic power of both groups. However, it is hard to foresee whether it is possible. Some hope lies in situationally conditioned cooperation based on cooperation within the Congress of Women in 2009 or joint 8th March celebrations, particularly in 2011. Nevertheless, I believe that both groups would benefit from accomplishing the set objectives, intensifying activity or overcoming stereotypes. In addition, 21st century is connected with the challenges of globalisation where it is becoming more difficult to win individually whereas formation of community generates power, strengthens energy and chances for accomplishment one's own objectives. This diagnosis as such does not constitute the complete basis for sharing and multiplying the knowledge and, here hopefully, it might make a useful contribution to this process.

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