Leadership in Higher Education with Special Reference to Women Leaders in Academia

Gülsün Sağlamer

In this age of rapid change, higher education faces many complex and interconnected questions in an environment where uncertainty plays a major role and decision-makers are faced with unprecedented and often unpredictable challenges. The first part of the article discusses the concepts of "leader" and "leadership", outlines the qualities expected of leaders from the perspective of uncertainty and analyses the criteria used to measure the success of leaders. The second part considers challenges and obstacles to women's leadership in higher education and the present situation of women academic leaders in Europe.

Content   Page

1. Challenges and Trends in Higher Education and the Role of Leaders and Leadership

1.1 Challenges and Trends in Higher Education

Defining the role of higher education in society and devising strategies for implementing that role is a never-ending task as society itself is in continuous flux. Individual institutions of higher education may choose to be active players in worldwide efforts to reformulate the functions and strategies of higher education or they may be content with implementing received wisdom from best practices around the world, but some may choose to resist change entirely by preserving their existing mode of operation (Saglamer/Karakullukcu 2004). Higher education faces many complex and interconnected challenges in an environment where uncertainty plays a major role. There is a great need for reform and improvement in institutions of higher education. Some of the factors that must be considered in today's environment can be listed as follows (Saglamer 2011):

· The move to mass higher education, with a strong increase in student numbers

· The many different types of higher educational institutions and strong competition between them.

· New environments have given rise to new criteria for quality assessment and qualifications in higher education

· Financial constraints put pressure on accountability and autonomy

· Internationalisation of both staff and students has gained momentum

· Competition for best students and best academic staff;

· The increased need to build a good reputation

· The pressure to ensure adequate funding.

As Kubler and Sayers state, "The issues confronting higher education systems and their constituent institutions are manifold, interconnected and complex, encompassing fundamental questions such as: how will they be funded, who will they teach, what will they teach, how will they be regulated and governed, who will they serve and how will they be structured" (Kubler/Sayers 2010, p. 3). The context within which we function is constantly changing and decision-makers are

faced with unprecedented challenges, which cannot all be predicted. On the other hand, as Michael Fullan states, "Universities, with all their brainpower, are much more resistant to change than many other institutions. Universities are great at studying and recommending change for others, but when it comes to themselves, that is another matter" (Fullan 2009, p. ix). Robert M. Diamond says of the resistance of universities to change: "Significant change will never occur in any institution until the forces for change are greater in combination than the forces preserving the status quo" (Diamond 2006, p. 2). Fullan asks important questions: "So what makes the difference between an institution that can change and one that cannot? Leadership. But what kind of leadership?"(Fullan 2009, p. ix)

1.2 The Role of Leaders and Leadership in Higher Education

What is the role of leaders/leadership in the change process? Does the institution have a memory and culture of being a leader of and partner for reform? Does the institution function within given regulatory and/or financial constraints or does it have the capacity to change the external constraints? Are the faculty and students motivated, ambitious individuals who can carry forward a system that relies on their initiatives rather than top-down processes?

Important questions

These questions must be answered positively for change to come about and demonstrate the complexity of the change process. It is a process that has three main stages: Vision – Decision – Action. In the second stage, an institution that is aiming for big changes should have a clear decision-making algorithm whereby decisions can be made efficiently and effectively. The university must then build up its action plan, which should include generating ideas for change and innovation, planning the change process, identifying and empowering change agents, engaging the community, implementing change strategies, and evaluating change.

The complexity of the change process

It so happens that I am a professor of architecture with a great interest in looking at the organisations in which I am involved in a holistic way. Having been educated as an architect and having taught architectural design for many years has equipped me to deal with uncertainty and helped me to be a problem solver rather than a problem generator, qualities that came in quite handy when I was appointed as rector of Istanbul Technical University, one of the oldest and largest higher education institutions in Turkey. Neither "leaders/leadership" nor "women's studies" are areas that I have been educated in directly but I have tried to learn from my extensive personal experience in both as well as from reading a lot on these topics. Sometimes my reading led me in certain directions to solve problems and sometimes I discovered related literature after I'd solved the problem. However, most of the

time a third option was the main pattern: there was no literature on that type of situation and then as a leader you are alone and have the responsibility to lead your team.

Leadership and leaders   The terms "leader" and "leadership" have been studied and defined by many researchers and scholars for more than a century. Definitions of the term "leader" have focused on a single person and his/her personal qualities and skills. The words "lead" and "leader" have typically referred only to authority figures. Here, I will quote the thoughts of different authors that fit with my understanding of the terms:

"The birth and evolution of the idea of "leadership" focuses on a much more complex concept, that reaches beyond the single leader but in fact, contemporary definitions most often reject the idea that leadership revolves around a leader's ability, behaviour, style or charisma" (Curtis/Brungardt 2011, p. 1). Today, scholars discuss the basic nature of leadership in terms of interaction among the people involved in the process: both leaders and followers. Thus, leadership is not the role of a single person, rather it can be explained and defined as a 'collaborative endeavour' among group members. Therefore, the essence of leadership is not the leader, but the relationship (Rost 1993), it is what leaders and followers do together for the collective good.

"In today's society, leaders operate in a shared-power environment with followers. No longer does a single leader have all the answers and the power to make substantial changes. Instead, today we live in world where many people participate in leadership, some as leaders and others as followers. Only when we all work together can we bring about successful changes for our mutual purposes" (Curtis/Brungardt 2011, p. 1). This understanding of the concept of leadership is supported by a recent interest in studying social aspects of leadership, which has drawn attention to the relationship between leadership and social capital.

Leaders, not bosses   Margaret J. Wheatley gives a concrete definition of "leader" which refers to "leaders" and also to authority figures but does not deal with the concept of "leadership" as such, although she does describe the expectations of followers: "In this chaotic world, we need leaders. But we don't need bosses. We need leaders to help us develop the clear identity that lights the dark moments of confusion. We need leaders to support us as we learn how to live by our values. We need leaders to understand that we are best controlled by concepts that invite our participation, not policies and procedures that curtail our contribution." (Wheatley 2006, p.131)

Here the author would like to share her own experience:

> For years in many state universities in Turkey, including my university, Istanbul Technical University, leaders complained about legal and financial limitations and created excuses for not making any changes in their universities. That was the starting point for me in 1996, when I decided to run for the position of rector along with 10 male colleagues. My argument was that a rector/leader of the university should not make a list of excuses for not making any changes. He or she must take the necessary actions and bring about the necessary reforms as and when they are required, otherwise there is no point in holding that position.
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> I started to prepare an extensive strategic plan together with my team for the coming 4 years aimed at implementing reforms at university level. The strategic plan was based on three axes: the first of these was education, research and innovation and serving society. The second included good governance, continuous quality improvement, human resources development, internationalisation and investment in infrastructure. These two axes related to internal constraints. The third axis consisted of the external constraints of legal limitations and funding.
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> We brought this plan to the attention of not only the academics eligible to elect the rector but also to all the stakeholders of the university such as alumni associations, students, administrative personnel and industry. It had a strong impact and in 1996, from among 11 candidates I succeeded in getting the most votes and being appointed by the Council of Higher Education (CoHE -YÖK) and the President of Turkey as the first female rector of ITU since its establishment in 1773. During the years 1996-2000 our leadership team implemented extensive reforms. All the promised targets in our strategic plan were reached. We even went beyond some promised figures and added many new projects and changes to the agenda of ITU.
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> This process taught me the importance of looking at the whole rather than the details when forming strategy, working to remove constraints and creating a devoted team that will work to bring about real change. It taught me the importance at the implementation stage of working together to bring about reforms, that success comes through understanding the importance of all stakeholders and giving them all a role and that details that were not focused on initially, must now nevertheless be addressed.

Margaret J. Wheatley continues to define the criteria to judge effective leaders: "They include the abilities to communicate a powerful vision, to motivate people to work hard for them, to achieve results, exceed plans, and implement change. We want their leadership to result in a resilient organization able to survive disruptions and crises, one that grows in capacity, that doesn't lose its way even after the leader retires." (Wheatley 2006, p. 179)

Younger academics

An example of implementing change that enhances strong and relevant leadership was the author's decision to involve younger academics in leadership teams in order to introduce dynamism and gain a broader range of opinion and input. At ITU, up until the author's rectorship, although there was no legal requirement for it to be so, advisors to the rector had always been full professors. As such they were of my own generation and had a similar world outlook and experience to me and to each other, while my team of younger yet well-respected assistant and associate professors made valuable contributions as advisors and project coordinators, being instrumental in the change process. This practice at the time/in the beginning met with some resistance from senior teaching staff at ITU, but continued after my two terms as rector and is now standard practice at ITU and other universities in Turkey.

Transformational leadership

The above is also an example of transformational leadership as defined by Koen and Bitzer (Koen/Bitzer 2010) who define two different types of leadership, transactional and transformational, that have dominated scholarly research on leadership since the 1960's. Burns' transactional theory (1978) offers a negotiated process in which the power bases of the leaders and the followers counterbalance each other. Consequently, the success of this leadership depends on the conviction that an individual can make a difference. Bass, a disciple of Burns, moved in a slightly different direction in focusing on collectively directed leadership, where any power exerted by leaders and followers mutually supports a common goal. Transformational leaders are self-confident and inspire, or display what is termed "emotional intelligence". However, [he] emphasises that transformational leadership must not be seen as motives or rigid categories; the key factor must be the "potential to motivate the academic community to respond effectively to change" "We believe transformational leadership in higher education should tend to arouse, satisfy and engage individuals, while simultaneously becoming a source of inspiration to staff, administrators, and students" (Koen/Bitzer 2010 , p. 2).

> In 1996, when ITU embarked on the reform process the author's leadership team had to prepare the ITU university community for owning the idea of reform. There was strong reaction from those who did not want any change, be it international accreditation or evaluation. Extensive research and discussions among the leadership team and the members of the Executive Committee of the university concluded that ITU should apply to ABET (American Board of Engineering and Technology) and NAAB (National Architectural Accreditation Board) for accreditation of study programmes and to EUA/IEP (European University Association/Institutional Evaluation Programme) for institutional evaluation. It took my team and myself three years to convince the majority of academics to support this process, as some conservative academics thought that since ITU was the best university in Turkey, international accreditation was unnecessary. Many meetings we-

re organised at both faculty level and university level, and sometimes also at department level in the case of large departments. The author gave presentations on this project to academics and other stakeholders and had many discussions with them. The ITU Alumni, one of the most enthusiastic stakeholder groups, funded this project from start to finish. This period allowed a "quality culture" to be created and embedded in the university and ultimately led to great success, as all ITU engineering and architecture study programmes had been accredited and evaluated by the year 2004. This was followed by another major success: the renewal of the accreditation of all ITU engineering programmes in 2012 as well.

The lesson learned from this process was that extensive reforms cannot be implemented without support by the majority of the academic staff and top down decisions should have bottom up support by individuals, departments and faculties if the development of an overall institutional quality culture is the goal. We also learned that face to face communication is essential to get colleagues to own new ideas, trends and projects.

1.3 Making Big Changes as Leaders at Institutional Level

For a leader to introduce big changes, there should be well-structured and monitored change management, and where a culture of change already exists, change will be more easily introduced. Networking at national, regional and international levels plays a tremendous role for both internal and external stakeholders, and the developing of institutional capacities for human resources, financial resources and physical/IT infrastructure should also be carried out parallel to other developments in order to achieve holistic change in the institution.

In the last two decades, strategic plans have been used as the main tool for realising change in higher education institutions, but the strategic planning process should be completely rethought. As Wooldridge stated, "the outputs have been long documents with a sound evidence base but seldom read or referred to on a regular basis. It's different now. Our ability to plan ahead is seriously constrained by lack of clarity about the detail of funding and government policy." (Wooldridge 2010, p.1)

"In many ways, the new kind of strategy is less a route map of how we are to navigate the future (since we do not know the whole map) but more an assessment of an institution's capacity to be agile and flexible in the face of emergent and unpredictable change. There is likely to be a heavy emphasis on having the right people and organisational culture, a vision that is truly engaging, a capacity to optimise the student experience and innovative stakeholder alliances/relationships which deliver new sources of funding and influence." (ibid., p. 1).

Self-improving institutions

Self-improving, adaptable institutions must be designed, insitutions that will encourage the creation of a community of internationally networked, motivated stakeholders, that will implement a multi-tier structure for controlling quality and will view the university central administration as the "last resort" agent of quality control and change. A self-improving institutional design requires individuals who will initiate bottom-up processes, take part in international networks and channel their international observations as useful inputs for institutional change and monitor the leadership to ensure progress (Saglamer/Karakullukcu 2004). Leaders and leadership are important but if the institutional design does not match the capabilities of the leadership team, it will take longer to reach the expected results. Therefore, top down and bottom up processes have to be integrated to create a suitable soil for the change process in universities.

1.4 Strategy for Permanency at the Forefront of Knowledge Creation: The ITU Case

Although much was achieved at ITU during the years from 1996 to 2004 towards becoming a leading global partner in knowledge creation, efforts to ensure the continuity of that trend constitute a more significant dimension of that period. The objective was to transform ITU into a learning institution that has the agility to change when the need arises. ITU should have the capacity to extend and modify its strategy and to implement it effectively. The general design principles that were followed to make ITU an effective and agile "learning" institution can be described as follows (Saglamer/Karakullukcu 2004) :

The general principles

1. All stakeholders (students, faculty, researchers in academia and researchers in private sector at the ITU's ARI 'Technocity', corporations, administration, etc) should be internationally networked, should be alert to new developments worldwide and should have the willingness and the institutional mechanisms to combine their insights and views towards shaping ITU's strategies on a continuous basis.

2. Quality should be continuously monitored by a multi-tiered mechanism.

   a   International benchmarking through accreditation

   b   Market position as measured by ITU's ability to attract the students with high university entrance exam grades, high quality faculty with international reputation, top entrepreneurs, leading technology corporations, sought after international partners etc

   c   The university administration as the final observer and supervisor of quality

3. The university administration should act as the key agent of quality control and change by coordinating new ideas, advocating the institution's positions externally and monitoring the system as a whole.

   a   The university administration should gather and disseminate all new insights flowing from the large number of networked stakeholders and coordinate the synthesis of a shared institutional strategy

   b   The university administration should advocate the institution's strategies to remove financial and regulatory constraints that may impede the institution's efforts.

   c   The university administration should monitor the mechanisms underlying the system such as accreditation, networking of stakeholders, forums for information gathering.

2.   Women's Leadership in Higher Education: The European Dimension

We are living in an era in which many changes are taking place at an unprecedented rate. Improvements with a view to achieving gender equality, however, are not keeping up with that speed. Much effort has been put into the issue of gender equality and it is still being pursued by public authorities, national governments and supranational organisations, sometimes with great commitment, sometimes with less; in some cases well focused, whereas in others rather unstructured. In any case, such efforts offer hope for the future but as yet, the results are far from our expectations. Horizontal and vertical segregation for women is still among the most important issues in higher education. The gender inequality issue is a problem that is as old as human history and we have reason not to be over-optimistic in our expectations when we remember that while it was in 1636 that the first woman entered a university, women began to be accepted in significant numbers into colleges and universities only about 150 years ago.[1]

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[1] Anna Maria van Schurmann was admitted to Utrecht in 1636 (Pieta Van Biik, 2010), but the more interesting question is perhaps when women started being admitted in such numbers that a trend started. Women first began to enter colleges and universities as both students and faculty around one hundred and fifty years ago. Not surprisingly, women have been struggling for equality within academia since at least the middle of the nineteenth century

2.1 The Present Situation in Europe

Vertical segregation

The academic careers of women are widely marked by vertical segregation with declining proportions as the academic ladder progresses. The She Figures, 2009 (pp. 73-74) demonstrate for EU-27 the proportions of male and female students and staff in a typical academic career and in science and engineering. They show that women stand less chance of reaching senior levels in higher education and research institutions, and also of holding positions of influence through membership in scientific boards (United Nations, 2010: 45-46). Compared to their share among PhD degree holders (EU-27: 45%) they are under-represented at a general level of participation in research (EU-27: 30%), and their proportion decreases (EU-27: 13%) as the hierarchical scale of university management progresses (She Figures, 2009: 28, 49, 97) (Tan *et al* 2011: p. 7)

The metaphors referring to women's predicament in academia are quite telling: Some of the most widely used and discussed in relation to universities are the "glass ceiling" metaphor, which defines limitation on academic promotions for women, the "chilly climate" one, which depicts the fuzzy academic processes for women and reflects inconveniences in the academic environment, and last but not least, the "leaking pipeline", which describes the decreasing representation of women throughout academic life.

Horizontal segregation

"Horizontal segregation" in research careers is understood to mean the issue of occupational choices by women and men. Proportions of female researchers, varying between 26% and 44% in the ten countries concerned, have not yet reached equality with those of men. (She Figures 2009:28)

Proportions of women researchers by sector in EU countries can be summarised as follows: business enterprise is the sector where the proportion of female representation is lowest. Similarly to the EU-27 tendencies, the proportion of female researchers in most of the EU countries is highest in the government sector, being followed by the higher education sector (She Figures 2009:31). The proportion of female researchers in the Higher Education Sector by field of science shows that there is a significant degree of segregation in terms of fields of study (She Figures, 2009:57) (Tan *et al* 2012, p. 7)

Not easy to go beyond the "glass ceiling"

In the author's opinion, successful women academic leaders are important role-models in encouraging young female academics to go beyond the "glass ceiling". However, much more than role models -or even devoted to this goal women academic leaders- is needed to help the younger generation of women academics aim for leadership positions in the academic world. Here we must look at the social environment in which women have been operating and the related conditions in the areas of higher education and research in particular. The She

Figures is a useful source for understanding how difficult it is to go beyond the "glass ceiling". From these figures we can easily observe that horizontal and vertical segregation in higher education is a serious problem in the European Higher Education area despite the fact that many projects addressing this issue have been funded and many measures have been developed and implemented in the last two decades at national and European levels.

According to the She Figures (2009) women constitute 54% of the students entering higher education in EU-27. This is a promising situation and many European countries even have a much greater percentage of female students than male ones in higher education. At graduation level, female representation is even higher, at 59%. The problems start at the doctoral education level, where female representation drops to 48%, and at graduation level it goes down again to 45%, and this tendency continues until "full professorship" level where only 19% of full professors are female in EU-27. If we look at the other related figures, the situation is even worse, with only 13% of the heads of departments being female. The proportion of women on boards is not promising at all: it is 22% for EU-27. Data related to the representation of women at rectorship and vice-rectorship levels are not available. There are some national figures at European level, but unfortunately we do not have any information about these top-level positions in the She Figures of the EU.

There is an important indicator called the "Glass Ceiling Index" (GCI) which shows how thick the ceiling is[2]. As it is, the GCI shows that the level of segregation is high even in the most developed parts of the planet. At European level (She Figures[3]) the Glass Ceiling Index figure varies between 3.8 (Ireland) and 1.2 (Turkey). EU-27 has an index value of 1.8 (2009). This vertical segregation cannot be explained in a simple way. Each country has its own dynamics, cultural values, traditions, and economic and social conditions. Consequently, it is not possible to create a prescription for all countries or to solve the whole problem at once. Similar stereotyping exists horizontally when we look at the distribution of women in different fields of study in higher education and research at European level.

The Glass Ceiling Index

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[2] For readers not familiar with the GCI "the GCI, can range from 0 to infinity. A GCI of 1 indicates that there is no difference between women and men being promoted. A score of less than 1 means that women are over-represented; a GCI score of more than 1 points towards a Glass Ceiling Effect, meaning that women are under-represented" (SHE Figures , 2009, pg 68).

[3] http://ec.europa.eu/research/sci. ence-society/document_library/pdf_06/she_figures_2009_en.pdf.

2.2 What are the Measures and Good Practices Necessary for Removing Obstacles and Barriers for Women Academics?

Persistence is essential for attaining substantive improvements. It must be a priority for leaders in academia to raise awareness of the issues and be proactive in bringing about gender mainstreaming.

More women academics at decision-making positions

There is a significant number of women who have gone beyond the glass ceiling in universities to become rectors, vice-chancellors, presidents and vice-rectors at European level. The most important challenge now is to increase the number of these women. For example, in Sweden, where 65% of university students and 50% of doctoral candidates are women, only 20% of full professors are women. On the other hand, 50% of Sweden's university presidents were women in 2010, whereas among the European University Association member universities, there were only 80 women rectors (present and former) out of a total of 850.

To increase the number of women academics at leadership positions, there are at least three steps ahead: creating awareness among women academics, convincing them to own the idea of seeking decision-making positions and helping them to take action to run for these positions. Achieving good representation at decision-making levels of higher education requires a systematic and structured approach with well-funded strategic plans.

The issue of quotas

Women's leadership within higher education has been studied by many researchers over the years. It has been concluded that direct positive measures such as women's quotas for full professorship or earmarked stipends for female candidates etc. often are disqualified as interfering with neutrality and meritocracy of science (Saglamer 2010). On the other hand, for top positions men have had "natural" quotas for centuries and nobody talked about whether it was against meritocracy of science or not. Positive actions do not only contain quotas. Networking, using role models or creating research funds and prizes to encourage young women scientists could also make a difference. There are remarkable developments that have been taking place at the European level. Under the 7th Framework Programme, the Marie Curie Programme has achieved almost 40% female participation in its fellowship programmes. The EU has already defined the target of 40% female participation in its research activities.

There are very many different examples across Europe showing that the problems faced in different countries come in different shapes with different mechanisms and depict a very complex issue. Therefore, more research and related action plans are needed to make even minor progress in the area of women's leadership in academia. There should

be concrete policies and strategies developed and implemented not only at EU level but also at national, regional and institutional levels to improve the conditions for women scientists and academics in order for them to achieve what they deserve.

Here the author would like to share her own experience:

> When I was elected and appointed as the first female rector of Istanbul Technical University, I thought my vice rectors should be men in order to keep the gender balance. Many people in the university were happy about this decision. When I was elected for a second period, I decided that now it was time to have more women in top positions. Two of the three vice-rectors I appointed were not only female but they had made great achievements in their own research areas. There was quite a lot of resistance to this move from the academic staff of the university. Then I made a statement that we should be discussing the new vice-rectors' qualifications, not their genders. For centuries ITU had had male rectors and vice rectors but nobody paid attention to this unfair situation and nobody talked about "meritocracy of science". That was the end of the crisis and throughout the years my vice-rectors demonstrated their quality and commitment in all their endeavours, establishing trust between the university administration and all stakeholders."

Removing barriers

Removing barriers plays an especially important role in the life of women academics if they are single mothers. The Istanbul Metropolitan area has a population of some 15 million and extreme traffic problems. Therefore, reaching ITU campuses from a different part of the city and also sending their children to schools in such a vast urban environment makes life difficult not only for women but for all academics in Istanbul Technical University. Therefore, increasing the amount of in campus housing and giving priority to single parents has had a remarkable impact on the life of women academics. Similarly, establishing nurseries, primary schools and high schools on ITU campuses for the academic and administrative staff has also taken the stress from the shoulders of academics and has had a great impact on the performance of the staff. These developments have created a sound relationship, a sort of mutual trust between the leadership of the university and the academic staff, which has encouraged them to devote their time and energy to the university more than before.

The role of the alumni

Donations of the alumni to such extensive investments have been another positive development in the ITU community and have built up a strong link between the university and the alumni. It should be noted that the majority of alumni and therefore the majority of donors were male, and were very responsive and supportive of me as the university's first woman rector. The schools that were established between 1996 and 2004 have become very popular in Istanbul and ITU alumni

started to send their children to these schools as well. This was not planned in advance but it came about spontaneously and gave birth to the establishment of good relations between academic staff and alumni at a personal level, which strengthened the ITU community in a different dimension. During the period 1995–2005 there was a remarkable improvement in the representation of women at different levels of academia at ITU (Table 1). These measures still play an important role in the improvement of conditions for female academics at ITU.

	'94–'95	'99–'00	04–'05	'09–'10
Professor	16%	20%	29%	32.0%
Assoc. Prof	31%	35%	36%	41.6%
Assist. Prof	28%	38%	46%	38.6%
Research Assist.	20%	35%	37%	44.7%
Total	28%	31%	36%	39%

Table 1   **Women Representation in ITU (Saglamer 2012)**

2.3   European Women Rectors Platform

With the aim of finding solutions to women's under-representation at top levels of administration in universities, the European Women Rectors Platform was established in 2008 at the initiative of a handful of women rectors and held its first meeting in 2008 at the ITU. At the end of the meeting it was decided to organise bi-annual meetings. In 2010 and 2012 two more meetings were organised by Istanbul Technical University and the number of participants increased from 20 to 45 and 79 respectively. The third conference attracted 79 participants from 29 countries, including participants besides Europe, also from China, Africa, Hong Kong and Israel. The Minister for the Family and Social Policy and the President of the Council of Higher Education of Turkey gave opening speeches at the opening ceremony of the conference, showing the importance of the issue on the Turkish government's agenda. In 2014, the fourth meeting will again be organised and hosted by ITU, and subsequently it was decided that the meetings should be held annually rather than bi-annually.

Sharing experience, discussing future strategies

So far, the objectives of the "Beyond the Glass Ceiling: Women Rectors Across Europe, Women and Leadership In Higher Education" conferences have been to examine the position and the experiences of women in higher educational administration and discuss the strategies

that could be used to improve the inclusion of women at this level. The conferences have aimed to help achieve these objectives through analysis and comparison of different international practices and policies.

The meetings have given women rectors the opportunity to share their experiences and discuss ways of improving the situation of women academics and have provided a collaborative environment for developing strategies for women to attain top management positions, as well as discussing future cooperation and new projects. The meetings have focused on new ideas to improve conditions for women academics and to remove the barriers of horizontal and vertical segregation. Another important aim of these meetings has been to create initiatives to cooperate with similar networks and organisations in the world.

At the end of the 3rd conference it was agreed that there was a need to institutionalise the work of the group, to define and prioritise urgent problems, and to work towards creating a support system, and that at the 4th conference concrete action in these areas will be the focus.

This networking has created remarkable awareness about the issue, and the problem at European level has become more visible. We have been able to get the support of our male counterparts to increase the number of women leaders in the European higher education area. In the last few years, although not at the level of our expectations, the number of women rectors has continued to increase at a good rate. There are also important improvements in the election processes of presidents in higher education networks. One good practice is observed in the election process of the president and board members of the European University Association (EUA). In March 2012, the EUA elected its first female president Prof. Helena Nazaré, and three female board members among eight. Such cases support the fact that we should be patient and persistent about reaching the substantive improvements we seek in gender equality. We must also be optimistic that in an era of accelerating change, gender mainstreaming will eventually come to be actualised.

Signs of progress

3. Conclusion

Leaders and leadership play a crucial role in higher education. We may list many important characteristics and competences of the leader/leadership team here. The list given below is not an exhaustive one. We need leaders and leadership teams that have a strong vision and mission to integrate top down and bottom up processes in an excellent way. We need leaders and leadership teams that have extensive knowledge of the higher education world and the environment in which they operate, have the capacity to learn-unlearn-relearn about higher education and related issues, the capacity to make the necessary changes and

realise the reforms that the institution needs. The leader/leadership team should be capable of communicating with all the stakeholders in a very efficient and effective way and should have effective networking skills to be able to remove the barriers that may prevent them from achieving goals. They should be able to establish a sustainable system within the university in order to guarantee the further development of the institution and also should have equal relationships with all the people in the university who will help the leader to establish trust between her/him and the rest of the stakeholders in the system.

Women's representation at the decision-making levels of higher education is still in its infancy. Measures taken to remove the obstacles and barriers, and giving opportunities for work-life balance to women academics in their working life will have an enormous impact on their promotion prospects and potential to reach top decision-making positions.

When talking about barriers and obstacles we should be aware of the fact that most women academics do not intend to compete for leadership positions. Therefore an important part of our efforts towards increasing women's representation at decision-making levels should focus on this fact and create projects and develop tools to encourage women academics to run for leadership positions. At this point "role models" and "mentoring" play a tremendous role.

Beyond the quota

There are many discussions about implementing a "quota" for leadership positions but a "quota" should only be used if two candidates have a similar level of performance. Another important issue is that even if we use a quota system for leadership positions in cases where an institution does not have a good distribution of women academics at all levels, in other words if the pipeline is leaking badly, it will probably appear rather artificial to have a woman leader at the top. An additional argument that should be considered is that a quota system might put a high burden on women academics and possibly reduce their possibility to achieve prominence in their academic field.

It seems that there is no easy solution; academic leadership by women must be encouraged while also ensuring conditions for women to achieve prominence in their chosen academic field. What we do need is a holistic approach that will support women academics at all levels, and will create a gender friendly environment which will empower them to accomplish their own achievements. It may take longer but it will certainly be more meaningful and more sustainable than simply implementing a quota system.

References

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Biography:

Gülsün Sağlamer is a professor of architecture and former Rector of Istanbul Technical University (ITU) (1996–2004), She has been a Board Member of EUA (European University Association) (2005–2009) and a member of the Steering Committee of the EUA's Institutional Evaluation Programme (2009–2013), an Executive Committee Member of the International Association of University Presidents (IAUP) (2003–) and chair of its European Council (2005–2010). She is a Member of the Board of Trustees of Kadir Has University (2006–), and a Board Member of The ITU Development Foundation (2009–2015). Sağlamer is the founder and Director of the Centre for Women's Studies in Science Engineering and Technology, and a member of the European Academy of Sciences, Arts and Letters.

Contact: saglamer@itu.edu.tr, gsaglamer@gmail.com