Chapter 11

Women in Transition: Institutional Change and Women’s Situation in Poland

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ABSTRACT

The chapter describes institutional and gender relations in the society and the economy, the influence of institutions and the state that may lead to the institutional change, which is understood as an adaptation of habits of thought to changing circumstances. The situation of women in Poland has been chosen to illustrate this phenomenon. Poland, as a country, has gone through major social, political and economic transformations in the last 25 years, and they have had important impacts on people’s lives. The analysis of the impact of major transformations in Poland’s post-war political economy enables the distinguishing factors (policies, institutions) that guarantee certain continuity in a society, and the ones that lead to institutional changes. Knowledge about the mechanisms of institutional change in the context of gender relations is helpful in designing policies aiming at promoting gender equality in societies as well as economies.

INTRODUCTION

As a type of social relation, economic relations are defined by institutions in which people act or are constrained from acting by social norms and expectations that structure people’s lives. Institutions are understood here not only as frames such as law but also as repeated actions, norms and informal rules that have their roots in experiences, traditional values or customs. In this sense, institutions are not only boundaries, but they function to shape the very essence of social life (Hodgson, 1993). People behave in the market in a way they are expected to, and it is very visible in gender relations present there.

In the chapter the situation of women in Poland is used as an example of the influence of institutions on social relations, with a special focus on gender order. Poland, as a country, has gone through major social, political and economic institutional changes in the last 25 years. The main objective of this paper is to present the impact of major transformations on the situation of women in Poland’s post-War

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polITICAL ECONOMY - THE COMMAND ECONOMY, SYSTEM TRANSFORMATION, AND INTEGRATION WITH THE EUROPEAN STRUCTURES. INSTITUTIONAL CHANGE LEADS TO TRANSFORMATIONS IN SOCIAL RELATIONS, AND SINCE INSTITUTIONAL CHANGE MIGHT BE ACHIEVED THROUGH THE USE OF POLICIES, IT IS WORTH TRYING TO ADAPT POLICIES THAT AIM TO PROMOTE GENDER EQUALITY. THE PAPER BEGINS WITH A PRESENTATION OF THE THEORETICAL BACKGROUND – AN INSTITUTIONAL-FEMINIST PERCEPTION OF ECONOMIC AND GENDER RELATIONS. THEN THE ANALYSIS OF MAJOR POLITICAL CHANGES AND THEIR IMPACT ON THE POSITION OF POLISH WOMEN IS PRESENTED. THE CHAPTER CONCLUDES WITH AN ATTEMPT TO ANSWER THE QUESTION OF THE IMPACT OF POLICY TRANSFORMATIONS ON GENDER RELATIONS AND INSTITUTIONAL CHANGE LEADING TO THE NEW GENDER CONTRACT.

BACKGROUND


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