Gender equality and occupational segregation in Nordic labour markets

The thesis analyses gender inequality in the labour market, in particular Occupational segregation by sex in Finland, Norway and Sweden from the 1970s to the 1990s. The thesis focuses on the divergence between the general perception of equality and the reality of inequality in the Nordic labour markets. The Nordic countries are in many ways model countries as far as gender equality is concerned, but women's position in the world of work is still considerably weaker than men's.

The background part of the thesis describes the impact of occupational segregation on women, theories on occupational segregation, the characteristics of Nordic labour markets as compared to other OECD countries and elements of Nordic equality policies. The statistical analysis of the thesis is based on census data for 1970, 1980 and 1990 compiled by the Central Statistical Offices. The original national data include approximately 300 occupations. In order to increase comparability in this thesis, a common occupational classification with 187 occupations was created for all three countries. This was possible owing to the sufficiently similar national occupational classifications.

The statistical analysis shows how the segregation situation of Finland, Norway and Sweden differs from other industrialised countries and how these three Nordic countries differ from each other in terms of segregation. Statistics are presented on gender-dominated occupations, segregation indices, monetization of household work (i.e. transfer of typical household work to the labour market to be done as paid work) and women and men in certain closely related occupations where there are distinguishable differences in status. The analysis also tests the explanatory force of segregation theories in the Nordic context.

The analysis confirms that the level of occupational segregation by sex has been, and remains, high in Finland, Norway and Sweden - both in absolute terms as well as relative to levels found in other industrialized countries. However, the level of segregation decreased from 1970 to 1990. Women have been more eager to cross the occupational gender barriers than men, who have preferred to stay in traditional "male" occupations. The extent to which women still work in traditional "female" occupations causes Nordic countries to have the relatively high level of segregation. These "female" occupations are consistent with gender stereotypes in society and the types of abilities and characteristics that are typically attributed to women. Women are also concentrated, in lower status and lower paid occupations than men, even if they work in the same field.

The thesis is largely based on the author's monograph with the same title (Melkas & Anker, 1998). The most important sources in the study are labour market statistics and occupational classification systems. As to the methodology of research on segregation, central sources are the works of Siltanen, Jarman & Blackburn, 1995 and Anker, 1998.

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