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ADDRESSING THE DEVELOPMENT OF A HUMANE TRANSPORT SYSTEM BY RECOGNISING THE NEED FOR EQUALITY IN TRANSPORT ORGANISATIONS

Key Words

Gender
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Abstract

Gender equality is a fundamental principle in the European Union and an essential prerequisite for economic growth, competitiveness, and sustainable development. Women account for 22% of transport workers, making this one of the most gender segregated sectors in European economy, with most found in support and administrative capacities.

A Pan European survey was conducted as part of the H2020 TInnGO project (<https://www.tinngo.eu/>) to investigate the experiences of female entrepreneurs and successful career women in different parts of the Transport Business Ecosystem (TBE) in 10 socially and economically divergent national contexts (United Kingdom, Germany, France, Sweden, Italy, Spain, Romania, Portugal, Latvia, Greece). In total, 61 interviews were conducted along with 14 follow up interviews which provided insights into their career paths, the barriers, enablers and qualities which had led to their business success. Although the results showed some variation between countries, persistent themes emerged relevant to women's

underrepresentation in transport. Key factors which contribute to underrepresentation included misogynistic attitudes, male dominated hierarchies, recruitment bias, reluctance to acknowledge a woman's role and contributions, gender pay gap, male- dominated professional networks, the gender 'glass ceiling'.

All women cite the extra effort necessary to prove their value and abilities. Through their fortitude and determination, and national frameworks for encouraging women into STEM careers, mentorships schemes and networks. The gender gap is slowly reducing. The recommendations show how a sustainable paradigm shift in gender and diversity mainstreaming in transport.

1. INTRODUCTION

This study was conducted as part of the 'Transport Innovation Gender Observatory - TInnGO' project (<https://www.tinn.go.eu/>), funded under the EU Framework Programme for Research and Innovation, Horizon 2020. The overall objective of TInnGO is to promote gender equality within the Transport Business Ecosystem (TBE), creating innovative know-how and strategic mechanisms for a sustainable change in the European transport sector, making use of the transformative strategy of gender - and diversity - smart mobility. The pan-European TInnGO Observatory is an information platform for innovation in the field of gender smart transport, providing a nexus for data collection, analysis, dissemination of gender mainstreaming tools and open innovation. To achieve this, 10 hubs were set up as part of the project in. United Kingdom, Germany, France, Scandinavia and Baltic region, Italy, Spain, Romania, Portugal and Greece. Their main objective is to extract and collect knowledge in mobility, gender and diversity from local and national sources, and deliver it to the TInnGO Observatory.

At a European Union level, gender equality is progressing slowly, but with marked disparities in key domains and among member states [1]. For example, women only form approximately 22% of transport workers [2] globally. The gender employment gap in the EU in 2019 was 11,7% with 67,3 % of women being employed compared to 79% of men (EU27 data); the gender pay gap in the EU stands at 14,1%. [3]; although women account for 52% out of the overall number of the European population, and yet only 34,4% of the EU self-employed and 30% of start-up entrepreneurs [4].

The transport sector is still one of the most gender - segregated in terms of both labour and the incorporated gender culture and roles. Hard working conditions, traditional gender stereotypes and prejudices, problems reconciling family- and professional life, as well as safety and security issues have been acknowledged as the main causes of women's underrepresentation in the sector. Whilst receiving less pay, women in the sector have to work harder against a background of harassment and discrimination to make their careers [5].

The TInnGO project aimed to provide a more nuanced understanding of labour market participation by providing a general and comparative picture of female entrepreneurship and of successful career women working in the TBE, across 10 EU countries using interviews and case studies. The aims of the study were:

1. To provide a comparative study of the situation of female entrepreneurs and successful women in the transport and mobility sector in partner countries in Europe.
2. To promote role models of successful business and career women in the transport and mobility sector, by showcasing motivational and inspirational portraits, thus providing arguments for women to embrace a career or invest in this domain (available on: www.tinn.go.eu).
3. To explore the main challenges to women's success and factors which have contributed to their success.
4. To highlight proposals and recommendations made by women to encourage gender mainstreaming, and foster female entrepreneurship in the sector.

2. METHODS

A mixed method approach was followed in this mainly phenomenological exploration of senior women's experiences in the transport sector. The study was preceded by desktop surveys undertaken by each national hub to understand gender inequalities in employment in general, and transport and entrepreneurship in particular. Female participants were recruited purposely, based on recommendations, desktop research, and existing networks. Inclusion criteria were level of seniority and experience in the Transport Business Ecosystem (including planning, operations, design, manufacture and education) either through holding senior posts or running their own business.

The study was ethically approved by Coventry University, as Lead Partner of TInnGO with the operationalization of data gathering left to each hub, depending on the type, number and availability of participants. Semi-structured interviews or focus groups were held in native languages, results translated and compiled by each hub in a standardized manner and reports sent to INTECO for consolidation and analysis. Additionally, more in depth, phenomenological 'conversations with purpose' were held with 14 participants (1 or 2 from each hub, representing different career pathways and transport domains) to create 'motivational portraits'. These have been promoted on the TInnGO website to inspire women to enter the profession.

In such a way, each hub - Lithuania, UK, Spain, France, Italy, Greece, Romania, Germany, Scandinavia and Portugal - acted as a case study providing:

1. A description of the situation with respect to the national entrepreneurial environment, with a focus on women entrepreneurship in transport and mobility and women's presence in the transport-related employment.
2. Phenomenological accounts of the difficulties, gender barriers and challenges faced by working in the transport industry, key factors that have

contributed to their success in business and career, proposals for better gender mainstreaming and women entrepreneurship.

3. A 'motivational portrait' of 1 or 2 'remarkable women' from the TBE who were either entrepreneurs or successful in a TBE organisation.

3. RESULTS

The results provide a phenomenological account of women's work experiences in the transport sector in 10 European countries. They highlight systemic discrimination and belittlement of women in the transport sector. This goes partway to explaining why women's participation in the sector remains consistently low. The EU average is 22%, in the countries participating in TInnGO, employment rates varied from around 26% in France and Latvia down to 16% in Greece and 14% in Romania².

The results showed that throughout their careers, women in all areas of the Transport Business Ecosystem have been faced with institutional, psychological and personal barriers and have had to fight to demonstrate their competence on a daily basis. The most frequently mentioned issues include:

- Prejudices, skeptical and depreciative attitude, misogynist language and behaviour from men colleagues, partners, clients, suppliers etc (particularly at the beginning of their activity);
- Gender discrimination at hiring, and in the job and in terms of career progress, women need to work harder to prove their value and skills. They are faced with the double standards in evaluation when compared to men. Unofficial limitations of professional progress (the so called 'glass ceiling');
- Internal bureaucracies related to maternity leave, motherhood and parenthood status, which slowed down / hindered their career progress. These affected personal perception related to the organizational environment and, in some cases, women moved jobs to escape this;
- The prevailing male working environment, particularly at the beginning of work or when working on new task/with new partners was intimidating and non-welcoming;
- Reconciling professional- and family life. The nature of some work in the transport sector is not family friendly. As the main carers in most families, women have to harmonise work- and family- related tasks can be an extra difficulty.

Although some felt that difficulties may not have been solely gender related, when starting talking about personal experiences, they refer to gender discrimination episodes, and provide concrete examples in this respect. For example a Swedish participant commented: *"In my professional life, I have experienced that I have not been listened to, even if you have good ideas, it feels like you are not being heard in*

² https://ec.europa.eu/transport/facts-fundings/scoreboard/compare/people/women-public-transport_en

the same way as if a man makes the proposal.” One from Spain, revealed that in her previous company in the marine sector, men would be shortlisted for interview over equally capable women. A participant from Italy remembers that in one company she worked with, women were addressed as “Miss”, while men were addressed as “Engineer”, even if they had the same role. A UK participant claimed she felt like she had entered a “*boys club*” and had left because of that.

Participants pointed out that this permeates the whole transport sector, and their whole career – from academic studies and / or training, to employment, promotion and management positions. For example, at university, women still form a significantly smaller percentage of students on STEM courses, so become used to being in a male dominated environment and having to work harder for the same level of recognition. From an intersectional perspective, gender stereotypes act in concert with other forms of discrimination such as age and racial discrimination.

In such a hostile environment woman must constantly prove themselves work harder, have better performance to be ranked at the same level as her male counterparts and overcome pointless barriers. This effects their self-esteem, confidence, and perceptions of peers of their abilities and capabilities. Several respondents said you need to have “*skin on your nose*” (i.e. a thick skin) when working in a male dominant workplace. Across all hubs, respondents commented on gender-based differences in competence assessment. A UK participant declared: ‘*I feel I have to work harder, to be tougher and more categorical, just as required in order to fit in the environment.*’ In the opinion of a French entrepreneur, the most difficult thing was to ‘impose oneself, particularly for young women’.

Some women commented that the biggest challenges they were faced came from the external environment (i.e. not their own organisation). The levels of discrimination faced during their early careers led to a build-up of frustration and discontent, and in some cases, to leaving the company.

4. INCREASING WORKPLACE DIVERSITY IN THE TRANSPORT SECTOR

It has been established across many industries that a diverse workforce leads to better profitability, satisfaction, creativity and empathic or tacit understanding of the market, users, or consumers. It may be assumed that the TBE would also derive such benefits if there was greater diversity. This is important because transport systems and vehicles are still largely designed by men for men, with little acknowledgement that the main users may be women, or people unlike themselves, who have different mobility needs. A humane, and inclusive city needs to be designed and operated by people who represent all sectors of society. This section provides a set of actions needed to increase gender equality and diversity across the transport sector, thereby ensuring that future transport is fit for purpose.

Gender mainstreaming through:

- Surveys to understand the lived experience of employees leading to the development of measureable and actionable Key Performance Indicators.

- Ensure equal pay measures and legislation to fill the pay gap and equal family benefits to address the discrimination and barriers linked to motherhood.
- Increase representation of women in boards and senior management.
- Develop further training opportunities to support and motivate employees to progress in their career and develop this sector.
- Provide coaching, mentorship and networking opportunities for female staff.
- Ensure all managers are trained in diversity and equality issues and can apply these to everyday situations to breakdown 'macho' culture and promote fairness in staff progression and opportunities.
- Provide opportunities for young people to experience careers in transport.
- Promote dedicated projects and decide economic and fiscal advantages for those who are oriented (companies and public and private associations) towards gender equality (in a concrete and measured way).
- Ensure that marketing, recruitment and human resource functions have gender and diversity sensitive policies and practices e.g. look at the images/language used in corporate/advertising material, look at when and how recruitment takes place, use gender blind applications, ensure equality in staff appraisals.

Policy recommendations:

- Gender equality must be set as an EU political priority, e.g gender pay gap, equality in maternity/paternity leave, recognition of need for flexible working to reduce dual burden of women.
- EU policies should focus on cultivating a gender balanced and inclusive mentality in educational institutions that prepare young women for their careers with further training in order to attract young ladies into STEM.
- Open datasets about female presence in the transport sector, establish innovative activities (e.g. hackathons, challenges) to highlight problems and motivate entrepreneurship and innovation in this field.
- Dedicated projects and experiments on at European level on "Gender Balance Smart Mobility" to address the "Gender Mobility Divide" with measurable and progressive objectives.
- Promoting entrepreneurship culture development in society within the national education systems and the support mechanisms in order to form and develop entrepreneur abilities and capacities, respectively, in school as well as throughout life.
- Higher education institutions must support students through specialized resources able to allow for practice in entrepreneurship.
- EU task force to create a level playing field with regard to gender and diversity e.g. ring fenced money and programmes for women entrepreneurs and SMEs: funding proposals should include a stated and measurable requirement to

provide gender and intersectional data; and include and deliver a gender and diversity impact and evaluation plan.

5. CONCLUSION

This phenomenological study has shown that across Europe, the transport sector remains unwelcoming to women. This is repeatedly demonstrated through accounts of misogynistic attitudes, male dominated hierarchies and networks, gender biases in recruitment, promotion and remuneration, reluctance to acknowledge a female employee's strengths, contributions and value.

If women and those from other diverse groups are not part of the workforce the development of transport will remain skewed in outlook and innovation, as there is little empathy or understanding of the needs of transport users.

Despite work related challenges, the professional women interviewed in this study remained committed and excited by their careers in transport. As transport becomes more mobility focussed and linked to sustainability and quality of life issues it is becoming more forward looking, broader in scope and appeal and offers many exciting new career paths. The transport sector needs to modernize to serve the needs of its employees and the citizens it serves.

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