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Rural Gender Studies in Austria – State of the Art and Future Strategies

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Rural Gender Studies in Austria – State of the Art and Future Strategies¹

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1. Introduction

Rural social research in Austria is a field of research with rather little institutional embeddiment at universities and research institutes although research interest and political awareness of rural areas have risen steadily since the 1990ies. Its exceptional position within social sciences results from various reasons which partly date back even to the 19th century. Rural sociologists have been often considered as conservative and not interested in social changes. Further reasons for prejudices are due to the close linkages of studies to *the agricultural politics and bureaucracy*, in the *distance to sociological theory* and in the *big variety of research approaches*. The different approaches often derive from the interdisciplinary collaboration with other disciplines like geography, landscape and spatial planning, ethnology, sociology, history, agricultural economics and women and gender-studies.

During a long period, women and gender issues were not on the research agenda of rural sociology in Austria. The first rural women study was conducted in 1966 and aimed to collect data about the participation of women in family farms beyond household work. In following studies the discrimination of rural women and its structural pattern in society were analysed and later on the potential and agency of rural women was revealed in several research projects. After the accession of Austria to the European Union in 1995 many incentives for rural gender research were given through the commitment for the implementation of the strategy of gender mainstreaming in all EU policies, programmes and projects. New women's networks were established, new organisations and institutions concerned with women and gender issues were built up and succeeded in initiating and implementing studies and projects.

A very dynamic process of networking, interdisciplinary cooperation and mentoring between different groups of women – researches, femocrats at national and provincial level, professional women in regional policy and rural development, women engaged in NGO's at

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regional and local level – has been started. But through these manifold and fruitful activities it became obvious that still many inequalities between men and women exist in rural areas. How should these disparities be addressed by rural gender research? Which strategies are appropriate to reveal the disadvantages but also the strengths of rural women and which visions are suitable to address the needs and wishes of them for more equal life chances in rural areas?

The purpose of this paper is to give an overview about the state of the art of rural gender research in Austria and to discuss future strategies for it. Therefore it is necessary to know about the history of rural social research in general and its institutional embeddiment at universities and other research institutes. Therefore, at the beginning a brief overview will be given about the different phases of rural social research in Austria. Each of these periods is characterised by a distinct set of main research questions. Despite these specific issues some traditional Austrian themes can be detected: the central role of mountain farming in Austria's agriculture, the traditional situation of part-time farming and pluri-activity and social aspects of rural spatial planning and regional policies.

In the main part of the paper the development process of research on women and gender in the rural context of Austria will be analysed. The new emerging issues of rural gender studies brought an expansion of analysis and enrichment of perspectives to rural sociology in Austria. The different stages can be characterised as following: (i) invisibility of farm/rural women in rural social research (1945-1965), (ii) studies on activities and the every day life of farm women (1965-1985), (iii) feminist rural studies and new emerging issues in a larger Europe (since 1985). This broad range of research issues indicates a rising interest on the problems, but also on the potentials of rural women in Austria during the last decades. Finally relevant issues and strategies for the future of rural gender research in Austria and in the European context will be discussed.

2. Rural Social Research in Austria

Up to now rural sociology has the flavour of conservatism and therefore it still seems not attractive at all for sociologists to engage in rural social research. But during the 1970ies progressive social scientists had challenged the rather narrow sectoral agricultural issues in rural sociology and new issues like disparities among farmers, regional studies on marginalised rural areas etc. were brought on the research agenda. Based on Wiesinger (2004), Pevetz (2000) and Vogel (2000) the following four phases of rural social research in Austria can be described: (i) early phase of rural social research, (ii) phase of farmer's

ideology of agriculture, (iii) critical-emanzipatory rural sociology and (iv) extension of issues and internationalisation of the rural sociology discourse.

2.1 Early phase of rural social research (1920-1945)

During the 19th century the ideological differences between socialists and conservatives concerning issues of agriculture and rural areas were tremendous (Krammer 1989). The period between the two world wars was marked by deep political gaps and undemocratic practices which lead to the authoritarian Austrian Corporate State. The isolation of rural sociology from sociology had its origins in the 1920ies and in the 1930ies. Many of the social scientists (Lazarsfeld, Jahoda, Zeisel) had to emigrate because of political and/or racial reasons. “Scientists” who were involved in rural sociology had strong relations to the authoritarian Austrian Corporate State and later often to the National Socialism. For the Austrian chancellor Dollfuss, who eliminated the democracy in Austria in 1933, the political Catholicism, the glorification of property and land and the farmer’s ideology were of big importance. Dollfuss saw in farm structures the order which should be decisive and a model for the whole society. Othmar Spann, who was a conservative Austrian philosopher, sociologist and economist and therefore the ideologist of the Austrian “corporate state”, formulated the basic “scientific” explanations for this ideology. He was radical anti-liberal and an anti-socialist. During the 1920ies, Otto Bauer, the well known Austrian socio-democrat wrote the central publication on the state of agriculture (“Kampf um Wald und Weide”) where he documented the social dimensions in agriculture and addressed the situation of small-scale farmers in Austria. The last chapters of this book were the basis for the first Austrian social-democratic agricultural programme (Wiesinger 2004, 95).

2.2 Phase of farmers ideology of Agriculture (1945-1970)

After the 2nd World War a continuity with the traditions of the Austrian Corporative State and the Reichsnährstand can be stated which found its expression in the interest on issues of traditional farmer’s ideology and its idealization. Many of the agrarian sociological studies were conducted with a historical, ethnical and ideological background and some empirical surveys were made in the field of village studies (Pevetz 1974, 9). Two scholars can be seen as main rural sociologists in this period in Austria – Hans Bach and Werner Pevetz. Bach was continuing and further developing the “universalism theory” of Othmar Spann when he defined his “holistic concept of the agricultural policy on the basis of family farms” (Pevetz 1974, 18). He worked about the impacts of the industrialization and modernisation of the society on family farms. Within this concept he provided indications on the service of farmers

for landscape keeping. Bach got 1969 the first chair on “Agricultural Sociology and Economics” in Linz in Austria. Pevetz was rural sociologist at the Bundesanstalt für Agrarwirtschaft, which was founded in 1960 and belongs as research institute to the Ministry of Agriculture, and librarian of the main specialised library on rural sociology in Austria. Up from the 1960ies he focused in his studies on the subject of the “multi-functionality of agriculture” and services (farm tourism) which the family farms provides for the whole society. He started the discussion on multi-functionality already decades before it became an issue in the EU. The lack of theory and the absence of discourse on a more abstract level seemed to be based in the scientific background if Austrian rural sociologists: most of them have studied agriculture, geography, spatial planning or were autodidacts in sociology (Wiesinger 2004).

2.3 Critical-emancipatory rural sociology and endogenous regional development (1970-1990)

This phase was marked by the progress of institutionalisation of rural sociology in Austria and by the rising agrarian opposition in the academic field. A new generation of critical-emancipatory social scientists started to question the farmer ideological positions (Pongratz 1988). Josef Krammer, the later Director of the Bundesanstalt für Bergbauernfragen, has analysed in a profound social study the context of the history of exploitation of farm families and their political consciousness (Krammer 1976). This study served as foundation for a new phase of rural sociology in Austria. New emerging issues like income distribution and subsidies in agriculture, the social and working conditions, power relations etc. became subjects of rural social research. Another critical study on the system of the Austrian agriculture (“Das Österreichische Agrarsystem”), which was conducted by Scheer, Krammer and Fornleitner (1978) had a tremendous impact to the ongoing discussions of agricultural, social and environmental problems in rural areas.

Beside the critical discourse in agriculture a new field of rural development studies was established. These studies were aiming at the development of rural areas well beyond the agricultural sector. In 1975 the ÖIR conducted a first study on the situation of rural areas in Austria. Many incentives also came from the supportive measures and programmes starting in the 1970ies which were directed mainly on practical issues of programming for peripheral rural areas (BKA 1981a, 1981b). The theory and policies on endogenous regional development, addressing an integrative approach going beyond agriculture, were of great influence on the practical work in rural areas (Dax 1995). Simultaneously critical initiatives were founded dealing with agricultural and environmental issues. This time was also

characterised by an intensified dialog and co-operation between scientists, politicians and people at the grass-roots.

At the University of Natural Resources and Applied Life Sciences in Vienna and at other university institutes – sociology, geography, spatial planning, anthropology and ethnology – of the Universities in Vienna, Graz, Linz, Salzburg and Innsbruck some researchers increased their interests on issues of “rural areas” and “rural population”. In 1979 the Bundesanstalt für Bergbauernfragen was founded and later on the Zentrum für Berglandwirtschaft in Innsbruck was established. The scientific exchange with the faculties of „sociology“ at the universities remained rather limited (Wiesinger 2004, Pevetz 2000).

2.4 Expansion of Issues and Internationalisation of the Rural Sociology Discourse (since 1990)

During the 1990ies rural sociology issues were expanded and an increasing involvement in international discourses in rural sociology can be observed in Austria. The changing pattern of agricultural policy in the European Union from a market-oriented productive to a multifunctional agriculture – which is an important sector in a sustainable rural development throughout Europe – had caused new research issues. For example international co-operations in the field of pluri-activity in agriculture (Dax et al. 1995a; 1995b), youth in rural areas (Dax and Machold 2002), farm succession (Vogel 2007) were conducted. Within EU research many co-operations were carried out. The discourse on regional and rural development has created a huge quantity of regional studies. With the preparation for EU-programmes of Structural Funds e.g. most of the Austrian regions have been analysed systematically. These studies were very much oriented on the regional analysis, strengths and weaknesses and provided a listing of possible projects in the area and the involvement of local actors of the region (Dax 1995). The following regional studies were dealing with a wide variety of issues. Furthermore new theoretical approaches were picked up in rural sociology like the globalisation-localisation-discourse, consumer-oriented approaches (organic food, quality food production, health and food), changes in structures and values in farm families, lifestyle-concepts, subsistence production etc. (Vogel 2000).

As already pointed out, rural social research didn't escape from its exceptional status – both in social research and in agricultural research. Austria has only one agricultural university, the University of Natural Resources and Applied Life Sciences in Vienna, and until now there exists no chair for rural sociology, although at the Institute of Sustainable Economic Development rural social research can be seen as institutionalized. There is also a strong co-

operation with the University of Bozen, Italy, and with other social research institutes in Austria. At the Federal Institute for Less-Favoured and Mountainous Areas in Vienna, social issues in rural development have been important since its foundation in 1979. At university institutes of geography (University of Vienna), spatial planning (Technical University in Vienna), sociology (University of Innsbruck) and IFF (Interdisciplinary Institute of the University of Klagenfurt) rural social research is conducted by some researchers.

3. Rural gender studies in Austria

While rural social research in Austria had started immediately after the 2nd World War the development of rural women and gender studies needed a longer period to start. During the 1960ies only a few studies were conducted which examined the importance of women in family farms for the existence of the farms. In these studies it became obvious that the work of farm women is manifold and can not be reduced to the work spheres of bourgeois women. In this period of structural changes and the modernization of agriculture, where people were increasingly leaving farms to find a job, the awareness of the importance of farm women for the family farms was rising (Pevetz 1984). Since the middle of the 1980ies critical feminists have established the structural category of gender in rural social research. Whereas women and gender studies are nowadays established at most Austrian universities, rural gender studies are carried out by some very active researchers, but are so far not very much more institutionalised. Sociologists or political scientists are not very much interested in issues of gender in rural areas. It is rather geographers, spatial and landscape planners who are involved in these studies. Apart from academic institutes a big variety of new private consultant institutes has been established, which are also carrying out research and consultation for different stakeholders in regional and rural development.

Research on women and gender in the rural context of Austria has been intensified since the 1990ies. Influenced by the feminist, social and environmental movements, by oppositional agrarian initiatives and new approaches in rural development (endogenous regional development), various studies related to women and gender issues were conducted. A critical feminist awareness on rural women was established in Austria rather indirectly through dealing with the situation of rural women in the developing countries (Oedl-Wieser 2000a, 22f). Women in rural areas were seen as two-fold marginalized group (Menne 1994) because of being a women and due to living in a (peripheral) rural area. At the beginning the interests of feminist scholars concentrated mainly on women in urban areas and there were little attempts to apply the feminist approaches to the social and economic situation of rural women. In the following overview of stages of rural gender studies main characteristics of

rural women and gender research and the evolving institutional framework in Austria will be pointed out.

3.1 Invisibility of farm/rural women in rural social research (1945-1965)

Although the various and manifold activities of farm women for the family farm and for rural life were of crucial importance, their impact was rarely noticed in rural social research in the period between 1945 and 1965 (Pevetz 1974, 167ff). Rural social research was mainly conducted in this period to gain information and advice for the agricultural administration, for the extension service and for politics. Basic social research on the situation of farm women, their position in the family and their own views about living and working on farms and in rural areas was not carried out.

3.2 Studies on activities and every day life of farm women (1965-1985)

New investigations were conducted by Federal Institutes of the Ministry of Agriculture which had the purpose to gain information for the extension service for reducing the work load of the farm women. These were basic studies with research interest on the division of labour between the members of the farm family. The aim of the first working-time study „*The share of the farmer's wife in field work*” (Schewczik 1971) was to get information about the participation of farm women in different working spheres beyond the farm household, including fieldwork, work in stables, work with machinery, manual work in the fields and farm tourism. 4,673 farm women were questioned on the daily routine, and the socioeconomic situation was analysed and described. Although the contribution of the women was analysed as absolute necessary for the farm, their work was qualified as “help” and the farm women were called “farmer's wife”. Merely an average of 9.8% of “farmer's wives” was regularly working in the pig production and cow sheds. In some areas the amount of manual labour done by women was still considerable and meant a great physical burden. Very often tourism meant an additional work load for farm women who had to do these activities additionally to the farm work. But even of those farm women who were concerned with tasks connected with tourism, a percentage of 81.1% were regularly “helping” in the stable and in field operations. Nearly one third of all farm women was driving tractors and took also part in the handling of agricultural machines (Schewczik 1971, 47). This analysis showed the big variety of the work burden of farm women and gave an idea of the structure of the farm family in Austria in the 1960ies.

For the second working-time study „*How much works the farmer's family?*” (Wernisch 1978-1980) on 200 Austrian farms, working-time diaries were written during the period of one year (1976) to get information about the workload of the different family members. In general, the daily working time of farm women was higher as that of the farmers and about 40.1% of their working-time farm women were spent in the household (Wernisch 1976-1978). The results from this very detailed working-time analysis were used as a basis for comparison with other occupational groups and for measures in the health service.

Since 1975 the *Austrian Farm women's organisation* is conducting every ten year a survey under approximately 1.000 farm women, who are asked about the profile of their work on the farm, their satisfaction with the working situation and division of labour, their physical condition, leisure time and their position in society (ARGE Bäuerinnen 2007; Geserick and Kapella 2006). In some cases the data show clear shifts since 1975: a high percentage of the questioned farm women don't like to be as much depended on agricultural subsidies as they are nowadays. In respect to their social situation more and more farm women articulate problems in living together with parents-in-law or with the own parents on the farm. One aspect which is rising continuously in the mind of the farm women is to work “in and with the nature”. The data and results of the different questionnaires are used as a basis for the political work for farm women's organisations, for bodies of interests in agriculture and also for the agricultural administration to deal with the manifold challenges in the working and social situation of farm women in Austria.

In 1976 Austrian researchers took part in a European study „*The economic and social situation of farm women*” (Austria, France, Germany, Hungary, Poland and Sweden) on women in agriculture and rural development. Main fields of research were the working situation, leisure time and the social role of farm women in the farm families and in the communities. In Austria 5 communities were selected – three in remote areas and two communities were near industrialised regions. The results revealed once more that farm women do a high amount of the agricultural work (50%) on the farms but that women are rarely involved in local or regional decision making (Bach 1982; Molterer 1981).

3.3 Feminist rural studies and new emerging issues in a larger Europe (since 1985)

Since the middle of the 1980ies a wide range of rural gender studies has been carried out and new research questions emerged like power relations on family farms and in rural society, gendered division of labour, access to resources like education, infrastructure, jobs etc. Rural women in general became now more and more the target group of rural sociology.

For instance also studies of the social situation of working class women were examined – their working situation, family life, work load and isolation patterns, if men are commuting out of the region. A broad range of research issues was emerging and indicated a rising interest on the problems, but also on the potentials of rural women in Austria.

From discrimination to empowerment of farm women

The new feminist studies brought not only changes in the research questions but also in the methodology which was used. With *“The prestige of farm women”* (Arnreiter et al. 1987) a new type of farm women’s study was established. Farm women themselves were invited to reflect upon their living and working conditions, to develop strategies for changing their situation and to formulate needs and support measures for changes. *This kind of participatory research turned out to become one characteristic in Austrian rural gender studies.* The study *“Farm women in conflict between tradition and modern age: Attitudes to employment of women, to marriage and family”* was the first basic social research on farm women in Austria from a feminist perspective. Using a differentiated methodological design Goldberg and her team (1997; 2003) explored the living and working conditions of farm women, their position in decision making on the farm, their economic situation, experiences of their own childhood and with raising children now, their views and attitudes towards partnership, divorce and children. In narrative interviews different patterns of female identities in family farms were analysed. The authors conclude that family farms also offer space for options, chances and activities for farm women. Not only “one” type of family farm is possible but different life models of farm families and farm women can be implemented. In the sense of post-modernism it lies in the hands of farm women to use the chances to re-construct their lives (Goldberg 2003, 224).

The role of farm women in pluri-activity

Simultaneously with the discussion on endogenous regional development the sector orientation of agriculture in the rural economic was challenged by rural social studies on pluri-activity. Dax et al. (1995a; 1995b) were participating in the European wide research project on *“Rural change in Europe: Research programme on farm structures and pluri-activity”* which lasted from 1986 till 1993. The programme aimed to improve the understanding of farm household behaviour in relation to the opportunities, resources and constraints affecting farm households in different circumstances and in different contexts. It focused on the influence of policy, farm and household characteristics, pluriactivity and local context on these changes. It was analysed that according to the reorientation and

modernization of farms women play a very important role. They often show higher sensibility for changes and adaptations of strategies (Dax and Oedl-Wieser 1993). Pevetz (1996) also conducted a national study on pluri-activity in which he analysed in detail the situation of female farm managers on pluri-active farms.

Women, rurality and gender mainstreaming

Beyond the “occupational group” of farm women other groups of rural women became subject of rural gender research. The first study was exploring the situation of young female workers in a remote rural area in the south-east of Austria in times of the iron-curtain (border to Hungary and Yugoslavia) (Benard and Schlaffer 1979). In a later study Menne (1994) analysed the process of empowerment of rural women and the establishment of an autonomous women’s house in the small town of Rohrbach im Mühlviertel. These regional and cultural-sociological studies revealed the extent of which women are rooted in the working, communication and interaction structures of rural areas.

Since the middle of the 1990ies rural areas in Austria became much more interesting for politicians because of the integration of rural areas in EU Structural Funds. Austria had during its first Structural Fund period (1995-1999) large objective 5b areas but also some objective 2 and 1 areas in rural regions. First comprehensive socio-economic analysis of the situation of rural women in Austria were carried out (Oedl-Wieser 1996; 1997). A new period of regional politics began in Austria and a new quality of programme planning started. In the most of the Austrian regions (objective 1,2, 5b) regional studies were conducted under participation of regional and local stakeholders. Oedl-Wieser analysed in her studies (1997; 1999; 2000a; 2000b) the extent of women’s participation in the planning process, in the formulation of policy interests and the implementation of the Structural Funds during the first period (1995-1999) in Austria. She revealed that women issues were scarcely addressed in the programmes and that women were seen only as a “problem group” and not as a distinctive group with different levels of education, of qualification, of different age and legal status etc. At that time no comprehensive gender-sensitive regional analysis was available (Oedl-Wieser 1999). She also focused on the various equality programmes since 1980ies and the strategy of gender mainstreaming to evaluate if there exist political instruments in the EU which are appropriated to address the serious problems but also the manifold potentials of rural women (Oedl-Wieser 2004a; 2004b, 2004c). She revealed that the percentage of women-related measures or measures which are used by women in the Structural Fund programmes and in the Austrian Rural Development Programme (2000-2006) was very limited.

In the following years more and more feminist researchers and consultants became interested in the issue (Pimminger 2001; Aufhauser et al. 2003; Gindl et al. 2004). Through Structural Fund programmes and Community initiatives of the EU the networking between women was not only promoted at the international level, but also at the national level (EQUAL projects³, INTERREG III projects⁴, and TEP projects⁵). An exchange and transfer of information from both sides started – from the feminist researchers and consultants and from the side of professional women in regional policy, bureaucracy, politicians, NGOs and women on the grass root. *This co-operation, networking and exchange of researchers with feminist stakeholders in politics, bureaucracy and grass root initiatives are another characteristic of Austrian rural gender studies.* That means that rural gender research is in many cases a reflective research where discussion and exchange of ideas with women at different spatial levels is an essential part of the research process and communication of results.

The commitment for the implementation of the strategy of gender mainstreaming in the Structural Funds (2000-2006) was one reason for starting many projects questioning how gender mainstreaming can be implemented in regional and rural policy (Pimminger 2001; Aufhauser et al. 2003; Gindl et al. 2004; Aufhauser 2005). Many of them produced handbooks but others were fundamental basic studies on gender-sensitive regional development.

In order to get knowledge about integrating gender mainstreaming in regional development the division for the co-ordination of regional policies of the Austrian Federal Chancellery commissioned an interdisciplinary team of feminist researchers - geography, regional research, agricultural economics and sociology – to conduct a study on “*Fundamental Principles of ‘Gender-sensitive Regional Development’*” (Aufhauser et al. 2003). The main research questions were: (i) In how far do regional policy interventions contribute to the (re)production of gender inequality? (ii) What are the costs of reproducing gender inequality by means of regional policy? (iii) What are the positive effects of regional development by addressing gender equality? (iv) What is the necessary framework for the implementation of more gender-sensitivity in regional policy in Austria? The authors were using elements of the different feminist approaches to develop a framework for a gender-sensitive regional policy which addresses stakeholders on all spatial levels. It was a main objective to generate an impulse toward the fostering of gender competence among the actors involved in the policy area of regional development. Two main target groups were addressed, on the one hand

³ GesiR – gender-sensible regional development; Just GEM; Farm women as day care mothers

⁴ MAP – Mentoring as instrument for personal training and development; GEKO; GENDERALP!

⁵ Territorial Employment Pacts in Austria

experts in regional policy and regional development and on the other hand experts on women and gender issues who have to deal with regional policy to give them information and arguments and to formulate political needs and measures.

As explained above many other regional studies with a specific gender focus were conducted within Community Initiatives and several programmes of the EU (peripherie 2005; Grasenick et al. 2005; Aufhauser 2005). Beyond the issue of gender equality and the implementation of gender mainstreaming other research issues emerged on the research agenda of rural gender studies in Austria: the political participation of rural women (Oedl-Wieser 2006), gender and sustainable development (Knoll and Szalai 2005), implementation of gender mainstreaming in landscape planning, subsistence production and the role of women in small scale-farming (Loibl 2004) and the strategy of gender-democracy for rural areas (Oedl-Wieser 2007).

3. 4 Institutionalisation of rural gender research in Austria

Whereas gender studies are already institutionalized at the Austrian Universities rural gender research is carried out by active researchers at different research institutes with no specialization on the issue. But rural gender research is not anymore as marginalized as it was before 1995. Still it has not reached the degree of institutionalisation which would guarantee a continuing and expanding research agenda. The main institutes which are involved are the University of Natural Resources and Applied Life Sciences, Vienna – Department of Economics and Social Sciences, Department of Applied Plant Sciences and Plant Biotechnology, Department of Landscape, Spatial and Infrastructure Sciences –, at the Institute of Geography and Regional Research of the University of Vienna and at the University of Klagenfurt – IFF. At the Federal Institute of Less-Favoured and Mountainous Areas in Vienna women and gender related research has been undertaken since 1995. Social research was always a very important aspect of research, besides regional and economic analysis. Rural gender studies are also conducted by private research institutes which are often also involved in consultant work.

5. Discussion and Conclusions

Since the last decade rural gender research has been expanded, considering the quantity of studies and the scope of issues although institutionalisation has advanced not very far. Rural gender research is nowadays not only the working field of rural sociologists but also of geographers, spatial planners, regional researchers, landscape planners of sociologists,

mathematicians, etc. This is a very interdisciplinary academic community which shows also the cross-cutting character of rural gender research. The overview about the research in this field revealed that the former quantitative studies about the work-time distribution of farm women were followed by critical sociological studies which questioned the social situation and power relations of men and women on family farms and in the rural society. After 1995 empirical studies dealing with the implementing of gender equality and gender mainstreaming in regional and rural development were conducted and further research issues emerged. In rural gender research the shift from women to gender studies in Austria can be stated in 1995. Regional studies which deal with gender-sensitive data-bases were interpreting the results in relation to men. In the case of men-related studies, the situation is similar to Germany (Schmitt 2005), where such a focus not really exist until now.

In the following relevant issues in rural gender research for Austria and in the European context will be summarized. To increase the acceptance of rural gender research in the mainstream research it is necessary to strengthen the knowledge and the awareness about the impact of gender in rural areas. For instance social and regional innovation is often very narrowly related to gender. The attractiveness of rural areas for people differs during the various ages and is also related to different needs of men and women. It is also obvious that the complexity of rural development can be better understood and analysed through the incorporation of the structural category “gender”. Important issues for rural gender research would be:

- Participation of rural women in decision making processes and policies in political structures, new intermediary structures, governance processes
- Social and regional innovations and the impact on women
- Multifunctionality of agriculture and pluriactivity
- Variety of life styles and life models of rural women
- Management strategies of female farm managers (e.g investment and management patterns)
- Advantages of IKT and lifelong learning for rural women

Comparative studies should be enhanced to make rural gender research more visible and meaningful for the mainstream rural social research. There were only a few studies (Overbeek et al. 1998; Bock 2004; FAO 2005) or statistical data-bases (European Commission 2002) carried out on a European wide perspective. There is a lack of data about the division of men and women living and working in rural areas – at regional and local level. It would be of big importance to create a comparative statistical database about gender

relations in the context of economic, social, political and cultural affairs in the frame of a European-wide study. It could create a suitable database for the stakeholders in regional and rural development and make gender issues in rural research more visible. Furthermore it is necessary to intensify networking structures between scholars in rural gender studies through out Europe. One possibility could be to establish a sub group on gender research in ESRS or to find ways of informal networking e.g. also through the publication of an electronical newsletter to connect rural gender researchers particularly from the South and the East, as well as North and West of Europe. All these efforts would contribute to raise the awareness of the necessity for a more gender-sensible regional and rural policy and for the development of a gender-democratic society in rural areas throughout Europe.

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