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Evaluation of gender disparities from the Balkan countries

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Abstract

Social gaps caused by gender differences were evaluated for the first time by PNUD (UNDP) using two composite indicators: Gender-Related Development Index and Gender Empowerment Measure. Among the criticisms these indicators have been subjected to, we note their inability to adapt its territorial context of the phenomenon. This paper aims the adjustment of an indicator for gender disparity in the particular context of Balkan countries by testing several dimensions of inequalities: cultural stereotypes, reproductive health, unemployment, longevity. The final results extracted by the factor analysis will attempt to identify how certain gender attitudes are dependent or not of the territorial architecture.

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1. Introduction

The concern of measuring gender inequalities emerged in the academic and political environment after 1990, along with the awareness of the actual connections between social risks and the presence of these inequalities, also as a result of highlighting the associations between these and economic growth (Dollar and Gatti: 1999). The implementation of the mitigation policies for gender inequalities, in a first stage, involves knowing the causes which lead to the emergence, the emphasizing and perpetuation of these odds, which implicitly assumes solutions for measuring the gender equality/inequality (Branisa et al., 2009). Although there are numerous studies in this direction, the most popularized quantification methods for the gender inequalities are proposed by PNUD (UNDP),

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which produced two synthetic indicators used worldwide: GDI (Gender-Related Development Index) and GEM (Gender Empowerment Measure). Subsequently, these two indicators were subjected to criticism coming from the perspective of the composing solutions for subsequent indicators, and also from the inability to synthesize very different socio-cultural realities. The answer to these inadequacies was the proposal of adjusting correctors or simple adjusted versions of the two already consecrated indicators: Gender-related Development Index, Global Gender Gap Measure, Gender Equity Index, Social Institutions and Gender Index, etc.

Radiography of these indicators raises the following issues: their multi-dimensional character makes difficult an adequate interpretation (Hanmer, 2000), normalization and standardization of initial parameters (Dijkstra, 2002), the central values used to obtain synthetic indicators hide statistics jamming. Heterogeneity of the variables that make up the indicators of gender inequality is one aspect discussed in relation to the representativity of their results. Firstly, most of the proposed indicators, attach by different methods values that belong to at least three dimensions of inequality: education, reproductive health, income, labor market access, etc.

The problem occurs when indicators are calculated for each of these variables: half of the variables are calculated in the form of participation rates, while the second half would rather prefer the type of female versus male rate. Their final aggregation will always hide statistics interference (jamming). Bardhan and Klasen (1999) raise the issue of income variables calculated within the indicators of inequality, their territorial variation being very high as well as the way in which the registrations made on this chapter differs greatly from one country to another. For example, if the Balkan countries, countries that experienced the communist regime, have as occupational structures peer review practice, all persons who have a minimum agricultural area. The effect is to artificially increase the working active population and income indicators deformation. Moreover a lot of information about income is kept at the household level and not at the individual level, making it difficult to interpret the results for not knowing the redistribution of funds within families (Akder, 1994).

Regarding the standardization of the variables that compose the final indicators, Dijkstra draws attention to the statistically heterogeneous nature of the used data. The new indicator proposed by him in 2002, called the Standardized Index of Gender Equality (SIGE), seeks to eliminate most of the previous errors using the standard deviation for each of the five variables that make up the mentioned indicator. Although the version obtained by Dijkstra manages to eliminate a significant part of GDI and GEM superficiality, the indicator is sensitive to the availability of data, to international comparisons, and to the proportion of each variable in the final value of the indicator.

The summary of the partial indicators in order to obtain a single quantifiably response, remains an open problem of the literature in domain. World Economic Forum proposes in 2006 a new global indicator for calculating the gender disparity, called Gender Gap Index (GGI). This has the advantage that uses weighting methods to observe the importance of each original variable individually. In addition, all variables are transformed in feminine-masculine type measures. With these new changes, the final indicator will no longer be sensitive to the variance of each component (variables with high variance held a higher weight in the final result).

Quality / Quantity conflict is also admitted by geographical disciplines that prefer in the case of gender studies a more consistent leaning towards the qualitative ones relying on emphasizing the reflective, subjective and personal aspects, contextual knowledge and specific experiences (McDowell, 2002). Not giving up the quantitative approach, geographers recognize the difficulty to approach the gender themes, particularly due to insufficient database selectively collected (Ortiz, A., 2004).

Extremely large differences between the indicators which, at least theoretically, measure the same thing, comes from the effect sub-indicators produce on the final outcome. GDI and HDI included information about revenue in the calculation formula, while GGM replaces the income variable with the differentiated participation in the labor market. The introduction of income variable produces a hierarchy effect on the final outcome, so that countries where purchasing power of the population is higher will grow in the hierarchy, regardless of the its distribution on sexes. Conversely, removing and replacing this variable with indicators for labor market participation will hide structural and statistical deficiencies of registration of active female population. Urbanized countries like Greece will be downgraded and those with a more rural population, active in the primary sector, will grow in the rankings (Romania, Bulgaria Albania).

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