

The Value of Women's Capital in Management: The Polish Perspective

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Abstract

Aim: The aim of this paper is to demonstrate the value of women's capital as a strategic asset in management and to trace the evolving attitudes toward gender equality in Poland over time.

Methodology: The study is based on a case study of the magazine Forbes Women Polska, an individual in-depth interview with an expert from the field, and an analysis of the Gender Equality Index (GEI) covering the years 2013–2024. This methodological triangulation ensures a comprehensive perspective on the issue.

Results: The findings highlight the significant benefits of maintaining gender equality in managerial positions, not only from an ethical perspective but also in terms of measurable advantages for firms and society. The study also reveals a gradual shift in public perceptions of gender roles in Poland, indicating increasing support for inclusive leadership.

Implications and recommendations: The paper suggests that prioritising gender equality is a strategic imperative for organizations aiming to unlock human potential, stimulate innovation, and ensure sustainable growth. Further research should continue to explore the socio-economic outcomes of gender-inclusive management practices.

Originality/value: This study provides a multidimensional insight into gender equality in Polish management through the integration of qualitative and quantitative methods. It offers evidence-based support for viewing women's capital as a key contributor to organizational and societal development.

Keywords: gender equality, management, project management, Forbes Women Polska

1. Introduction

In recent years the issue of gender equality has become increasingly popular. One may notice this in mass media, the world of science, politics and day-to-day life. What is important, it is to acknowledge the real advantages of this movement and to present the positive changes in society owing to implementing new policies and principles. In this era of disruption that we all live in, new actions need to be taken. Assessing gender equality in Poland is highly interesting due to its history, culture, religion and economy. The multiplicity of aspects influencing the level of actual equality in Poland makes this research topic truly relevant. What distinguishes this paper is its in-depth exploration of Poland's socio-political transformation and its impact on gender equality in management, particularly through the lens of *Forbes Women Polska*. While the existing research often focuses on specific gender-related issues such as promoting gender equality by the United Nations (Krook & True, 2012), domestic violence (Grzyb et al., 2018), and women's political participation (Fuszara, 2017), this study provides a comprehensive overview of gender equality in management from the communist era to the present. By analysing *Forbes Women Polska* as a case study, the author highlights the role of the media in shaping the perception of women in leadership and contributes to the discussion on gender equality through a business-oriented perspective (Kark & Eagly, 2010). The originality of this article is based on the detailed description of the rapid changes in Poland – starting from the years of the planned economy, 1989 as the year of transition, then the open economy, EU accession, up to the modern times that are full of rapid changes in political, economic and social area. There are numerous articles on abortion law in Poland, domestic violence, the labour market and politics. The research gap explored in this article is described as the lack of overview of gender equality in Poland from communism until now, and the accurate description of gender equality in management nowadays, which show a broader perspective of gender equality in management. The author used a qualitative research method such as a case study of *Forbes Women Polska*, an individual in-depth interview with an expert in that field, and a quantitative method, namely an analysis of the Gender Equality Index. Both the subject matter and the chosen research methods ensure new points of view and distinguish this study from other research conducted in that field. The aim was to demonstrate women's capital as a valuable asset in management and to show the changing attitudes towards gender equality in Poland over time. The research questions are as follows:

1. How has the Global Gender Gap Index changed in Poland compared to other EU countries?
2. What are the directions and the factors of change of the role of women in management and the economy in the past and nowadays?
3. What is the perception of women and their management styles in Poland?
4. What has the greatest success and impact of *Forbes Women Polska*?

2. Literature Review

The issue of gender equality has become increasingly popular for ethical reasons and economic growth. If there is untapped professional potential, creativity and skills in half of a society, it is impossible to talk about effective development (Scott, 2021). According to the Secretary-General of the OECD, José Ángel Gurría, women are the most underutilised economic asset of the global economy (Dźwigoł-Barosz, 2016). The case of Poland is extraordinarily interesting due to its historical background and rapid changes, including in the environment, politics, society and economy. Firstly, the times of socialism and the centrally-planned economy seemed to clarify the importance of the occupational activation of women. The regime ensured that the unemployment rate remained as low as possible, thus many policies were implemented to help women become active careerwise. One must note that this kind of equality was applied only to work, while household chores were still women's responsibility. In 1984, employed women statistically spent almost 7 hours a day on domestic duties, while employed men spent only 1 hour and 20 minutes (Watson, 1992). During the economic transition, the social and political environment changed remarkably. The social policy that was expanded during socialism in

Poland laid the foundation for being professionally active. There were many benefits to nurseries, kindergartens and employees. After the economic transition, many women were left without state support, which led to a high unemployment rate among women after the economic transition in 1989 (Siemieńska, 2008). In order to shed light on the cultural background of these developments, one must acknowledge the role of the institution of the Catholic Church in Poland. Since 1656, when King Jan Kazimierz Waza crowned the Virgin Mary as the Queen of Poland, Polish women have dedicated themselves to suffering and grieving as role models by committing to social roles, family and the nation as if there was no choice (Gerber, 2010). The next significant change came with the accession to the European Union. The development was brought on by means of a hard law and a soft law. In terms of gender equality, the changes were implemented via directives, strategies and action platforms. In the 2000s, the implementation of law in Poland that was compatible with EU values was dependent on the political orientation of the government. The consensus on gender equality policies depended on right-wing or central/left-wing governments. Frequently, the phenomenon of feminism was portrayed as a Western invention (Gerber, 2010), therefore one must emphasize the role of legislation due to its positive effects on society. One of the most important acts that helped women take political positions was "Ustawa Kwotowa" [act on quotas] implemented in 2011 and based on the idea that 35% of every electoral list must include 35% of women – as the underrepresented gender. Despite the controversy around this resolution and the fair argument that this solution is not perfect, one must note that since then many women have been given the chance to reach a high position in decision-making politics (Pięta-Szawara, 2015). Currently, the role of women in management in Poland is complex and evolving. Women constitute 43% of all managerial positions in Poland, which indicates their significant presence in this sphere. However, despite this positive aspect, many women still experience discrimination and feel that they are not treated equally to men. Polish women face many obstacles that are conditioned by social norms and personal beliefs. One may highlight five main difficulties that women experience in the field of management. The first one is the popular strong belief that men are more effective in management. Second is related to family responsibilities – despite the increasing awareness of gender equality in all European Union countries, the burden of running a household and raising children is still disproportionately laid on women. Another cause is the lack of courage and the lower availability of women, which leads to unwillingness to take responsibility for difficult decisions. Another point is the stereotype that women are too emotional, thus not capable of holding a managerial position. The final, fifth reason, is the issue of pregnancy and maternity leave. Pregnancy can be perceived negatively by the employer and also may result in lower availability and performance of the mother (Babuchowska et al., 2024). Socio-cultural traditions have a significant impact on women's participation in managerial positions. Deeply rooted cultural traditions and values are often the main factors influencing women's opportunities for advancement in many countries. In particular, although the political, economic and legislative context can influence women's participation in managerial roles, the greatest constraints often result from the negative attitudes and stereotypes that exist in society (Davidson & Burke, 2012). When vying for a corporate presidency, a woman aspiring to the position must demonstrate qualifications and competencies that are, on average, twice as extensive as those of her male counterparts; unfortunately the glass ceiling phenomenon is still very common (Eichelberger, 2005). Gender equality is a fundamental element in improving the quality of life in Poland, and its lack is still clearly felt. It is recommended to implement policies that support equal rights and address issues of discrimination in various spheres of social life (Lisowska, 2017).

Nowadays, in these times of uncertainty, it is acknowledged that human capital is the key factor of long-term investment that any country can implement in terms of quality of life and future prosperity (Coe et al., 2019). With the aim of achieving sustainable development goals (SDGs) by 2030, achieving gender equality (SDG5) is an unquestionable priority (United Nations, 2022). EU countries are now obligated to implement quotas due to the directive Women on Boards. The European Commission proposed this directive in 2012 as a result of the inadequate increase of women in managerial positions, which underlines that gender equality in companies improves their performance and corporate

governance (Leszczyńska, 2018). The approach to gender equality among managers differs between men and women, and women more often complain about 'glass cliffs', a higher percentage of women on the board can lead to more democratic workplace practices, which in turn can benefit organizations (Melero, 2011). Maintaining gender equality in decision-making positions contributes to higher employment satisfaction (Tominc et al., 2017). Moreover, the representation of women on boards is positively correlated with financial returns, and this correlation is greater in countries that have stronger shareholder protections (Post & Byron, 2015). It has been acknowledged that project-based companies with a greater representation of women have a positive influence on organizational performance. It is even more important to amplify gender equality among project management organizations in terms of the strength of women's capital. By embracing the capital of women in project-based companies, a firm can profit by contributing to innovation, higher outcomes and competitiveness (Baker et al., 2019).

2.1. Forbes Women Polska

The cultural grounding theory emphasises that the media shape society's perception of reality and have a significant impact on society in many ways. They are crucial in shaping individual behaviour and social dynamics by providing information, education and entertainment as nowadays the media take up a significant part of people's free time (Mehraj et al., 2014).

Although women are increasingly visible in the business world, they have historically been underrepresented and misrepresented in the media, including the business media, which has adversely affected their entrepreneurial ambitions and career goals. Studies examining how often women are featured and quoted in business media consistently reveal patriarchal biases that diminish their standing in the business sphere. The presence of women in the media can yield numerous benefits for the enhancement of gender equality. Firstly, adequate representation of women in the media contributes to shaping a positive image and role models that may inspire other women to pursue professional success. The media possess the potential to promote (or hinder) gender equality by directing public attention, shaping public understanding, and focusing on significant societal issues (Power et al., 2019). Professions and organizations are inherently gendered, with gender-related traits being valued differently. Masculinity is often prioritised, particularly in leadership roles, leading to an imbalance in the status of women and men as leaders (Lämsä & Tiensuu, 2002).

The recognition and success of the Forbes Women Polska magazine can be attributed to several elements that can be captured as part of its branding. The magazine style combines various brand components, which leads to its easy recognition. In its articles, the brand's personality is built through narratives about unique characters. Forbes effectively communicates with consumers through the consistency of its style and content, which favours the perception of the magazine as a reliable source of knowledge about the world of business and finance. Thus, the magazine has become a powerful tool in shaping public opinion and creating aspirations among people striving for success, which in turn contributed to its recognition and success on the market (Vasilchenko, 2019).

In 2024, Forbes Women Polska celebrated its 5th birthday. One could say that it is not just a magazine due to being involved in many projects, including social projects with high impact. Forbes Women Polska creates podcasts and rankings of inspiring and empowered women, not only with background in business but also from the worlds of arts, culture, sport, science, and politics. Collaboration with different organizations, e.g. SEXEDPL, helped Forbes Women Polska create greater social influence and set good practices for firms such as "Firma przyjazna tacie na etacie" (which is a father-friendly company), which, among others, encouraged companies to provide parental leave for fathers and showed advantages to this solution. The magazine is an example of how public narration has changed over the past few years. However, the main initiative was embarked on in 2004, and it took 15 years to amplify women's role in that project (ForbesWomen, n.d.). Forbes Women Polska is a leading example of changes within Polish society towards traditional gender roles.

2.2. Gender Equality Index in Poland

The Gender Equality Index was created by the European Union, namely the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE). The data, sourced from the EIGE, underline the credibility and reliability of the presented trends. This ranking has been conducted since 2013 and analyses gender equality in EU member states from the perspective of the following criteria:

- Work: participation in the labour market and distribution along with the quality of the work performed;
- Money: financial sources and economic situation;
- Knowledge: academic achievements and distribution of knowledge capital at various educational levels;
- Time: time spent caring for the dependant, unpaid work at home and time for social activities;
- Power: political, economic, and social;
- Health: health status, access to healthcare, and life expectancy (EIGE, 2023).

Table 1: Global Gender Gap Index in Poland compared to other EU countries

Year	2013	2015	2017	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
European Union score	63.1	64.4	65.7	66.9	67.4	68.0	68.6	70.2	71.0
Polish Score	55.5	56.9	56.8	55.2	55.8	56.6	57.7	61.9	63.4
Position in the ranking	15 th	16 th	19 th	24 th	24 th	23 th	21 th	18 th	19 th

Source: author's study based on the Gender Equality Index 2013-2024.

Table 1 presents the Global Gender Gap Index for Poland compared to the European Union average from 2013 to 2024, highlighting trends in gender equality. Over the observed period, Poland's scores show a gradual improvement, particularly from 2021 onwards, with a significant increase from 56.6 in 2021 to 63.4 in 2024. Despite this progress, Poland consistently scored below the EU average, reflecting a persistent gap that has narrowed slightly in recent years. Notably, Poland's position in the ranking has fluctuated significantly, dropping to 24th place in 2019 before recovering to 18th in 2023, suggesting the influence of varying national policies and socioeconomic factors.

3. Methodology

This study examined the changing landscape of traditional gender roles in Poland and highlight the importance of women's capital in management, focusing on a case study of Forbes Women Polska. This selection was chosen due to the magazine's prominence in the Polish media landscape and its role in shaping discussions around gender dynamics. This article also incorporates insights from an individual in-depth interview with an expert from Ringier Axel Springer, who was chosen for his/her expertise in gender equality issues, particularly within economics. With the aim of completing the background of women's capital in economics, project management and decision-making positions, the author analysed the GEI in Poland in comparison to other EU members, and studied the topic starting from 2013 because the data are available since then. This combination of methods provided a complex overview, exploring the subject via both qualitative and quantitative approaches. The Individual In-Depth Interview (IDI) was designed within the format of general to specific themes. This method provided a wealth of information about the current state of gender equality in Poland and trends over the years. The main objectives of this interview were to address the following three aspects:

1. The role of women in management and economy in the past and today – directions and factors of change.
2. The perception of women and their management styles.
3. Forbes Women Polska.

This interview was especially important and valuable for the research because of the expertise of the interviewee and the multidimensional perspective of the subject. The IDI enriched this study with information on personal experience over the years, advanced updated knowledge about the topic in general, and information from the industry.

Forbes Women Polska was chosen as the case study because it demonstrates good practices in business and the value of women's capital in management, and shows how Polish society is changing towards gender equality projects. Additionally, the visibility of women in business is crucial in the mainstream, yet over the years, women were underrepresented or even misrepresented in the media, which had harmful effects on women's entrepreneurship. The media, of any kind, social, mainstream or niche, shape public opinion and influence it, either promoting or negating gender equality (Power et al., 2020). In carrying out this qualitative research, the author aimed to capture the complexity of the phenomena and investigate the actual context of Forbes Women Polska (Gaya & Smith, 2016).

4. Results

4.1. Case Study of Forbes Women Polska and IDI

We need to start with the 1989 economic transition. Poland regained independence after years of communism and socialism. People can criticize that time in many ways, but during this period, Polish women were emancipated, and their contribution to the economy of that time played a major role – said the interviewee. This regime required people to be employed, so women worked and were educated, and as a result they held managerial and decision-making positions. After the transition, Poland became a democratic country, and this is an unquestionably advantageous moment in its history. Considering the situation of women during that time, women (including Solidarność members) confirmed that conservative counterrevolution occurred, and the role of women in society once again reverted into the traditional one *Even the men who were in the democratic government back then did not care much about women, said the respondent.* One of the results was the law supporting the stance of the Catholic Church that restricted women's reproductive rights. That was the gesture of taking away rights from those who lived through those difficult times, but the men in the new democratic government decided to downgrade women and reinforce the role of the clergy. A fragment of the interview transcription confirms this through the respondent's remark that *In the book "Stulecie Kobiet. Usłyszeć siebie" (ed. A. Bellwon), one of the most influential women, said that "Solidarność would not have existed without women but the electoral lists for the democratic opposition were created by men, and there was no place for women in them". Only one side obtained the access.* Thus, women were excluded. The history of taking away women's rights in democratic Poland is long and still prevalent. As mentioned before, democracy was an enormous opportunity and a positive change, but within this, women's rights were reduced. Afterwards, Polish accession to the European Union played a major role in reshaping attitudes towards gender equality in Poland. Even over the past eight years of conservative and right-wing rule, the previous government was obligated to establish a directive such as work-life balance, which was in women's favour. The role of the European Union can be seen as a driver of positive change in gender equality in Poland, however the COVID-19 pandemic has led to further gender inequalities in Poland. Many women were pushed out of the market because of the economic situation as numerous companies had close or were forced to make mass redundancies, but at the same time many women also decided to resign from their jobs to take care of their children and people who needed extra help, such as the elderly and people with disabilities. This situation was dictated not only by traditional gender roles but also by economic, rational decisions. Statistically, women earn less, not only because of the pay gap but also because women more often work in lower-paid professions.

The respondent highlighted this, stating that: the implementation of the 35% quota made an enormous difference in Polish politics, although that law was not given to women out of the kindness of the

government but had been lobbied for by women over many years. The Congress of Women [Kongres Kobiet] and the feminist movement in Poland achieved this in 2011. Thirty-five percent of the political lists had to be filled by the underrepresented gender. As a result, women often obtain positions on lists that no one voted on, but despite this issue, due to this directive, in 2024 Poland had the highest percentage of women in government since 1989. Another major movement also seems to be coming. The EU's Women-on-Board Directive is controversial in many areas, and sometimes even women claim that they do not need this kind of law because if somebody is good at their job, they are going to obtain an adequate position. Unfortunately, this narration can be disastrous. Naturally, there are some expectations that women are able to climb career ladders without being able to conquer difficulties, however, in 2024, many business environments were strongly patriarchal and did not have space for women in management. Directives and laws regarding gender equality can make large positive changes. By implementing quotas and parities, women will gain possibilities to ultimately be in positions for which they have competence (Engeli & Mazur, 2022).

As expressed by the interviewee: *In the last eight years it has been difficult for the government to maintain women's rights in Poland, but one can notice that the current labour market is composed of emancipated women due to the shortage of talent and professionalism. In times of uncertainty, companies have realised that, aiming at success and competitiveness, they should reach for women's capital, which currently has untapped potential.* In addition, many firms have feminist policies, and they require female representation in some specified areas. The visibility of women in business and management is crucial for explaining gender equality. The fact that women are seen in high positions in organizations and expert discussions is a sign that women can do so. It creates an image that women are capable of achieving something, and it is not reserved only for men.

At one of the most important conferences on management, the Global Peter Drucker Forum, it was discussed for a few years as how profitable it is to be diverse and gender-equal. Different culture managers working in the environment with many generations and also maintain gender balance, are more effective, create more innovations and are more flexible towards change and challenge. Furthermore, at present, clients who are deciding from which company to purchase goods or services – seek relatability. They want to contribute to firms that have similar values and outlooks. In addition, the COVID-19 pandemic has shown that the management style needs to change from autocratic to more emphatic, and be based on better communication and taking care of their workers' needs. When staff started to work from home, many firms faced the issue of not being able to control people in the workplace, could not manage them. Finally, the companies in which the management style was more emphatic and those that focused on soft skills were considered to have “won”. They emerged from the pandemic crisis almost unscathed or even stronger. To achieve success in times of uncertainty, employees need to be engaged, loyal and driven by some idea/mission. Thus, this situation requires a new style of leadership that focuses on networks and ideals. Moreover, one should not completely differ in the management style on gender because this is not true. What is important is to leave the old, autocratic management style as it is no longer effective, and instead tend more towards the new, updated and more realistic style. Therefore, what is the reason behind patriarchal management, business and society as a whole? Although there is a large amount of data and evidence that more gender-balanced companies bring more profits, not every company is eager to take advantage of this change. Some of the reasons may be the convenience of the male managers, a force of habit and the lack of will to share the power. Women in management and project management implement solutions that could be beneficial for the whole company and introduce unexpected good practices that will also be profitable for men. One example is the situation when the CEO of one of the largest companies in Poland implemented a new rule for the board meeting after taking the post. This change can seem to be small and irrelevant, but after a few years, it made a great difference and had a positive impact.

As highlighted by the interviewee: *overall, every revolution has led to counterrevolution. Now, it comes to a light as a controversy towards feminism.* Despite creating many empowering organizations and spaces for women, many people criticised feminism as a new-age fad and defend patriarchy as an old, good model. One of the related issues is also the crisis of democracy that occurred in Poland, the growing polarisation of society and the shift to the far-right political parties. In Poland a great step

forward was made when people started using and 'normalising' feminine nouns. Language shapes reality. Polish language conjugates, and hence it is unnatural not to conjugate verbs in female form. Ironically, so far society has accepted female nouns only in accordance with 'less prestigious' jobs. Society in Poland has accepted the noun form of, e.g. 'cleaning woman' or 'schoolmistress', but using the female form for professors or ministers somehow sounds strange and not normal. The history of feminine nouns in Poland is interesting because before the wars and communism, those forms were normally used, which historical sources clearly show. The fashion for using only male forms for professionals started with socialism in Poland and was strictly followed by past governments. Nowadays, the mainstream media promote using female forms, especially regarding high positions. This change can shape a new mindset toward gender roles. Forbes Women Polska carried out many projects that empower women in business, management and society. Some of the best initiatives were social actions and networking groups, such as Dad-friendly companies on a full-time basis with the code of good practices, equal action companies, equal voice initiatives, Forbes Women x SexEd, and LGBTQ+ community leaders open to business, all of which worked as an addition to profitable magazines, e.g. Forbes Women Polska which was an enormous success in itself. The interesting and motivating content supports not only women but also successfully promotes the whole diversity of people. Moreover, the magazine collaborates with different organizations also engaged in gender equality issues, e.g. in the field of science, medicine, and entrepreneurship.

To conclude, Forbes Women Polska is an example of how the mentality of Polish society has changed towards gender equality. The complexity of the actions taken by Forbes Women has promoted progress toward gender equality with every new project. Recently, a woman was chosen as the Editor of Chief in Poland. This change could also have happened due to the initiative of Forbes Women Polska. Patriarchy is convenient for men because it gives them power and many privileges, however one must note that it also harms them, both women and men equally. The many examples given above prove that a new style of management and gender equality is a solution for many current challenges.

4.2. Gender Equality Index in Poland

Note that the index announced in any given year typically contains aggregated data from the previous two years. Therefore, the index from 2013 mostly contains data from 2010, and in that case, the index investigated the Polish state since 2007. Data from 2017 often reflected the reality of 2015, hence it is important to view the index as an announced statistic from previous years.

Poland consistently fell below the EU average every year. While the 2013 index may include data from the early 21st century and can be indirectly explained by the 2008 financial crisis or its relatively short EU membership, the results from subsequent years are more concerning. In addition, one must note that during the 2008 crisis, Poland was a so-called 'green island', as the financial crisis did not affect the Polish economy as negatively as did the rest of the EU. In any event, like all the crises this one was noticed by the Polish society, especially by women responsible for those care-dependent (Czerwińska et al., n.d.). First and foremost, the index did not always increase, and even if it did, it grew too slowly.

In 2015 Poland scored 56.9 points, while the EU average was 64.4. When the next report was announced in 2017, Poland had 58.8 points, whereas the EU average was 65.7, which was a slight decrease from the previous ranking. One may say that 0.1 was not a disaster, but the fact that for over two years no improvement was made is not a positive outcome. In 2019, Poland recorded another decrease, then 1.6 percentage points lower than in the last ranking. The EU average had increased by then by 1.2 p.p. This situation in Poland was explained by the imbalance of work-life for women. In that period, Poland was governed by a conservative political party, which could have also influenced women's inequality. This could arise due to the cultural norms and social gender obligations. In 2020, the Polish score increased by 0.3 p.p., while the EU average rose 0.5 p.p. Taking into account the increase itself, the Polish increase was similar to that of the EU, however there was an 11.6 p.p. disparity in 2020, a significant difference that showed that Poland was far below the EU average

regarding gender equality. The 2022 index mainly comprised data from 2020, the year of the pandemic outbreak, which showed that there was a significant problem in Poland with the unequal division of care responsibilities for children and care-dependent people. Furthermore, it is common for both Polish women and men to rely on relatives rather than institutions for domestic help, and this leads to deepening social inequalities, both in terms of age and gender. One must emphasize what is clearly visible in this ranking: 67% of women and 23% of men carry out household duties independently. This shows that the balance in the house chores division has not changed much since the times of socialism in Poland – as previously discussed. This is inequitable and often leads to women working two jobs, despite the lack of formal recognition of the second one – the first being a full-time paid job, and the second the full-time job at home – which is culturally expected of women in the former Eastern Bloc. The crisis associated with the pandemic has highlighted gender equality differences, with the most significant ones being domestic violence and invisible workload. The strongest domain of the GEI in Poland is money, and the greatest room for improvement is in power. This area may improve after taking into account the government elected in Poland in 2023 and the implementation of the Women on Boards directive (EIGE, 2023). In 2023 the difference between Poland and the EU average was 8.3, and one can observe that the disparity has decreased, but there is still a large room for improvement; this ranked Poland in 18th position in the EU. Since 2020 the Polish score increased by 4.2 points, which was one of the biggest upgrades in the EU during that period of time. Moreover, in terms of economic power in Poland there was a significant increase. In 2023 the index showed 38.9, while over ten years ago it was only 27.5, hence there is a lot of catch up with.

Poland in 2023 – is one of the biggest countries in Europe and is classified as highly developed by the HDI index – remains below 50% of gender equality in the area of power. Perhaps the future statistics will indicate more positive scores, but for now these results cause concern. In 2024 there was the 20th anniversary of Polish accession to the EU, and yet there are still many areas to improve towards gender equality. However, some progress was made – since 2013 Poland has scored 6.4 points, while the EU average rose to 7.1 points, and that despite that there is still room for improvement

To conclude, even Sweden, famous for its egalitarian approach, in 2023 scored 82.2 points out of 100. This shows that the whole European Union needs to focus on reducing gender inequality. Poland has been below the EU average for years and this needs to change as this situation has a negative impact on management, economics and society. The arguments presented in the article have shown that there are many benefits from gender equality and it is high time to implement gender equality in Poland and in the EU.

5. Discussion and Conclusions

Socialism aimed at the emancipation of women, enabling them to gain professional experience. At that time the nurseries were subsidised, mothers received appropriate maternity benefits, and their workplaces were protected by law. Unfortunately, this was associated with the 'double burden' of women, as they were burdened with both domestic and professional responsibilities to an equal extent. Most professions were characterised by the dominance of one gender. Women were the disadvantaged group in this aspect, occupying positions in lower-paying sectors, such as services, but paradoxically, this could save them from mass layoffs, which affected men working in heavy industry and agriculture. During socialism, women pursued higher education more frequently than men, who mostly chose vocational qualifications. A university degree somewhat protected workers from unemployment, but its significance diminished in a free-market economy. Women, during the economic transition period, could take advantage of the opportunity to build cultural capital, consisting of foreign language skills, analytical abilities, and better representations of themselves (Iván, 2003). The Catholic Church played a significant role in shaping the role of women in society, appealing to them to return to traditional female roles, namely as guardians of the 'domestic hearth'. A popular ideology at the time was the glorification of women who stayed at home, with a desire to exclude them from political life

and tighten abortion laws. Discrimination against women in the labour market was not only a return to old traditions but also primarily caused by the new 'rules of the game' in the capitalist market. Employers openly stated that employing women was associated with high costs due to motherhood. Additionally, after the economic transition, Polish women were more affected by unemployment than men, and this was one of the consequences of the 'shock therapy' carried out in Poland (Kramer, 1995).

Later on, accession to the European Union unquestionably enforced laws that advanced gender equality in Poland. According to Article 2 of the European Union Treaty, the EU bases its values on respecting the dignity of every person, the respect for human rights and equality, including gender equality, and democracy, including minorities. The values that should guide all EU members are pluralism, tolerance, justice, non-discrimination, and gender equality. The aim of the Union is to promote peace and values and ensure the prosperity of its member states. The fundamental values of the Union are the rule of law, respect for human rights, freedom and democracy (Śledzińska-Simon, 2011).

In this era of disruption, women's capital in management is essential. Climate change, migration crises, wars, democracy crises and recent pandemics show that the old ways of management do not work anymore. Years of gender inequality have led to unsustainable development. Women CEOs and women in top operational management can positively influence voluntary carbon disclosure, whereas board chairpersons may have no influence on carbon disclosure or quality. It is especially important to meet sustainable development standards in the EU. The research showed that a quota of 30% for women in top management teams positively impacts on voluntary carbon disclosure and quality (Caby et al., 2024). In Poland, there are an increasing number of women in top managerial positions, which could occur due to EU directives, the Polish quota law (i.e. "Ustawa Kwotowa"), mentioned before, and many social projects. Analysing the factors behind the changes in the perception of women's management styles reveals a dynamic interplay of cultural, economic, and social influences. Historically, perceptions of women in leadership were shaped by entrenched stereotypes that aligned women with nurturing and relational traits, often seen as a contrast to the authoritative and competitive characteristics traditionally associated with male leaders. However, contemporary research highlights the unique advantages women bring to management, such as fostering collaboration, empathy, and adaptability, traits that are increasingly valued in addressing complex global challenges. These shifts in perception are partly driven by the rise of gender equality legislation, EU mandates promoting diversity, and broader societal recognition of the necessity for sustainable and inclusive growth. In Poland, the gradual increase in women occupying leadership roles, combined with evidence of their positive influence on organizational outcomes, challenges outdated norms. As firms embrace diversity, they often observe that women's management styles not only align with but also enhance strategic goals, contributing to long-term profitability and innovation. This ongoing evolution reflects a broader understanding of leadership that transcends gender and prioritizes effectiveness, inclusivity, and resilience.

In 2023, the gender equality index in Poland was at 61.9, and the EU average score was underreported. Poland's lowest-scoring domain was that of power (36.4 points). Despite the increase in the score since 2020 by 2.0 points, Poland has remains in 20th place. This is due to other Member States making faster progress, combined with stalled progress in the subdomain of political decision-making, in which Poland scored 47.2 points. In the subdomain of social decision-making, Poland ranked 26th, with 26.2 points, which was the country's lowest score for any subdomain (EIGE, 2023). This shows that even since 1989, Poland has had a historically high percentage of women in government, and there is still a need for improvement. The economic power score in Poland was 26% and 20%, while that in the EU – 33% and 28%, respectively (EIGE, 2023). The figure showed a small percentage of changes on the negative side in Poland as Polish women face many obstacles in their pursuance of management positions. One of the reasons is the cultural standard for gender roles, and the other is the old accustomed management style existing in many firms. The capital of women in Poland was not being embraced, however the tendency is changing. Many firms have witnessed the positive impact of gender equality on project management and management. The capital of women can fulfil the need for expertise, talent and creativity. Women in top management create new rules that are ultimately

beneficial for the whole company. One must emphasised that gender equality in management creates profits due to its visibility and the fact that customers can relate with the company. New challenges and new times need new solutions. Hence, gender equality in management and project management can increase profits for society, climate and company revenues.

6. Conclusion

Poland is a country between the East and the West, not only in terms of geographical location but also its mentality. The history of Poland – wars, communism, and EU accession – definitely shaped Polish society in a particular way. The phenomenon of gender equality in Poland also has had its ups and downs. Polish women obtained the right to vote in 1918. From 1945 to 1989, Poland was dependent on the USSR, which contributed to complex issues around gender equality. On the one hand, there was a great impact on women's employment and education, which had positive effects on women's emancipation, while on the other, women had to work two shifts – their 'normal' job – and the other shift at home doing household chores. Moreover, people stopped using female forms of nouns describing jobs and thus stopped the correct Polish conjugation. Since 2004, when Poland accessed the EU, many positive changes towards gender equality have occurred. The requirements of EU law did much for changing gender equality standards in Poland. At present, the rising awareness of society, legal requirements and the use of the female forms for professional occupations are making large changes in Poland.

There is a growing evidence that the benefits of gender equality contribute to the greater percentage of women in management, including project management. The rise of public service announcements, the multiplicity of foundations addressing gender equality issues in many areas and the visibility of women CEOs have made positive changes in Polish society. As mentioned before, our society live in an era of disruption, with crisis upon crisis. It is naive to believe that an old-fashioned system with many incorrect assumptions and errors will still be profitable. The case of Forbes Women Polska is a perfect example of showing the capital of women in management and the changes towards gender equality in Poland. Many social projects, collaboration with other gender equality institutions and organizations, valuable podcasts and popular magazines have had positive impact, undoubtedly being a success.

In addition, this paper shows the shift in the gender equality index achieved by the European Institute for Gender Equality, reflected in the figures for the level of gender equality in Poland. This index examines gender equality in power, which also includes power in management, however it clear that there are many things to catch up with. Nevertheless, one must emphasize that many things have already changed for the better. In 2024, there was a historically high percentage of women in government, and many women are breaking stereotypes and glass ceilings and obtaining positions in organizations that are appropriate for their expertise and experience.

There are currently numerous complex aspects influencing gender equality in management in Poland, hence it is crucial to implement gender equality policies, as they can benefit the whole society. Public-private partnerships, global benchmarking, and support for professional women's networks can drive systemic change. Prioritising these interventions is critical for fostering equitable economic growth and maximising women's contributions to society. To enhance the utilisation of women's capital, businesses and policymakers should implement evidence-based, gender-inclusive strategies. For instance, the business sphere could implement:

- Leadership development: Polish businesses should introduce mentorship and sponsorship programmes aimed at fostering women's advancement into executive roles. These initiatives can be aligned with best practices in talent management, addressing underrepresentation in decision-making positions.

- Diversity in hiring: The adoption of blind recruitment practices, alongside setting measurable diversity targets, can mitigate biases in hiring processes and support equal opportunities across sectors.
- Workplace flexibility: Expanding remote work options, flexible schedules, and re-entry programmes for women following their maternity leave or career breaks can address one of the most critical barriers – balancing work and family responsibilities.
- Equity in funding: Poland's financial ecosystem should establish dedicated funding streams for women-led enterprises. This includes grants, microloans, and partnerships with venture capital to enhance entrepreneurial opportunities for women.
- Pay equity: Conducting regular pay audits and transparently reporting progress can address wage disparities. These audits should be legally reinforced and encouraged across both public and private sectors.
- Market responsiveness: Businesses should focus on innovating products and services tailored to the needs of women, recognizing their influence as primary decision-makers in consumer markets.

Policymakers may also implement:

- Financial support: Policymakers should prioritise expanding access to microloans and grants for women entrepreneurs. Simplified application procedures and advisory services can further encourage participation.
- Education initiatives: Investing in STEM education and vocational training specifically targeted at women and girls is essential to increase female representation in high-demand sectors. Collaborations with private companies can enhance these programmes' practical impact.
- Legislative action: Enforcing pay equity laws and introducing gender quotas for corporate boards will accelerate gender balance in leadership roles. Additionally, simplifying legal and administrative frameworks for women-owned businesses will foster entrepreneurship.
- Infrastructure improvements: Enhancing the availability of affordable childcare services and ensuring the safety of public transportation systems are critical steps to reduce barriers to workforce participation.
- Data and accountability: Systematic collection and analysis of gender-disaggregated data on labour market participation, wage gaps, and access to funding will inform evidence-based policymaking. Transparency in reporting is crucial for tracking progress and identifying areas for improvement.

The value of women's capital is high, yet it is not fully embraced. Both companies and managers need to be prepared for the endless challenges that the whole world is currently facing. By taking advantage of women's capital and reducing prejudice towards any gender, people can only benefit in many areas, including financial gains.

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Wartość kapitału kobiet w zarządzaniu. Perspektywa Polski

Streszczenie

Cel: Celem niniejszego artykułu jest ukazanie wartości kapitału kobiet jako cennego zasobu w zarządzaniu oraz przedstawienie zmieniających się postaw wobec równości płci w Polsce na przestrzeni lat. Artykuł analizuje, w jaki sposób zmiany społeczne, gospodarcze i kulturowe wpłynęły na postrzeganie roli kobiet w strukturach władzy i w biznesie.

Metodyka: W badaniu zastosowano metody jakościowe, w tym studium przypadku Forbes Women Polska oraz pogłębiony wywiad indywidualny. Dodatkowo przeprowadzono ilościową analizę danych pochodzących ze wskaźnika Gender Equality Index, pozwalającą na porównanie poziomu równości płci w Polsce na tle Unii Europejskiej.

Wyniki: Analiza wykazała, że Polska wciąż pozostaje poniżej średniej unijnej w zakresie równości płci, szczególnie w obszarze władzy. Pomimo pewnych postępów widocznych w ostatnich latach, nadal istnieje potrzeba intensyfikacji działań na rzecz równości. Działania Forbes Women Polska odgrywają istotną rolę w budowaniu świadomości i wspieraniu kobiet w sferze zarządzania.

Implikacje i rekomendacje: Wyniki badania wskazują na konieczność pogłębionej analizy regionalnej, zbadania wpływu konkretnych polityk unijnych oraz większego zaangażowania organizacji społeczeństwa obywatelskiego w promowanie równości płci. Rekomenduje się dalsze badania dotyczące efektywności konkretnych inicjatyw wspierających kobiety na rynku pracy i w strukturach władzy.

Oryginalność/wartość: Oryginalność artykułu polega na połączeniu analizy długoterminowych zmian historycznych z aktualnymi danymi statystycznymi, co pozwala na ukazanie złożoności zjawiska równości płci w Polsce. Praca skupia się na konkretnym przypadku – Forbes Women Polska – i pokazuje, jak realne działania mogą wpływać na kształtowanie postaw społecznych i struktur zarządzania.

Słowa kluczowe: równość płci, zarządzanie, zarządzanie projektami, Forbes Women Polska
