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# **Women into Functions!**

## **FiF (Frauen in die Funktionen!)**

***A Project of the Green Party of Vienna and the Green Women of Vienna to increase the political participation of women within the party.***

*by Monika Vana*

### **Aim of the Project**

The project's aim is to raise the quota of women in all the bodies and gremia of the Green Party of Vienna and, in particular, among the higher positions and functions. The project was prompted by rather sobering results of an internal survey: Despite a female quota of at least 50% on all the lists of candidates of the Green Party of Vienna at the community level, most of the leading positions were still held by men. Women had a much harder time gaining leading functions.

In the district councils of the 23 districts of Vienna the situation was even more worrying: In many districts not even 50% of the Green mandatories were women, let alone the higher functionaries. Therefore we launched a follow-up project under the title of "Women into the districts!" (FiB – Frauen in die Bezirke!), in order to increase the participation of women in district politics as well.

### **First Phase of the Project**

In order to find out what the stumbling blocks are that keep women from joining the Green political work in more numbers we commissioned an external evaluation process. In the course of this process the gender specific effects of the organisational and communication structures of the Green Party of Vienna were investigated. Particular attention was devoted to identifying factors that exclude women from political participation as well as factors that encourage their active participation. Based on this analysis the potentials for change towards a more balanced participation of both genders were to be defined and, according to these potentials, proposals for concrete measures to eliminate the stumbling blocks were to be formulated. These would include the creation of structures that meet the needs of women in order to promote their successful candidacy.

### **The Findings with respect to the culture of communication**

The survey revealed that, while the program for women's policy of the Green

Party of Vienna is very progressive, internally the same gender specific power mechanisms and role stereotypes as in the rest of society have prevailed so far:

Men take up more time and space in meetings. They talk more often, longer and louder than women. Women tend to keep their contributions to discussions short and do not repeat what has already been said. The larger the group, the fewer the contributions of women.

Men receive more attention when speaking, while significantly more disturbances and demonstrations of lack of interest can be noted among the audience when women are talking.

The style of speaking is dominated by the male pattern – offensive, self-important, even rude –, while women are less self-confident, often relativate their statements and ask more questions.

Male ritual fights for dominance push women into the background, while offensive women are irritating to both men and women. On the other hand, men are capable of combining rivalry and support, especially within their “old boys’ networks”, while women often have problems handling competition and are still in the process of creating their own networks.

Expertise and knowledge are more easily attributed to men than women.

Therefore, men are more frequently consulted as experts. As a result men make up the majority of participants in Green panel discussions. Usually women are given less credit for being experts and they are judged more critically.

Political topics are gender specifically attributed as well. Women rather concentrate on social issues (women, health, social affairs, animal protection, culture), while the “hard topics” are mainly occupied by men (traffic, finances, economy, urban planning and city development).

Women are much more self-critical than men. Men are quick at claiming something as their own success, while women tend to talk of good luck, coincidences, etc. rather than of their own achievements.

### **Findings on supporting and impeding factors for women**

Supporting for an active involvement of women, among others:  
an amiable, pleasant and cheerful working atmosphere, nice, supportive people, personal contact,  
appreciation and acknowledgement for contributions and achievements,  
positive feedback, being respected and taken seriously,  
openness with respect to structures as well as political contents and positions,  
possibilities for a start in contributing to the work of the Greens at a low level in the background,  
being trusted and entrusted with responsibility, for example as a candidate for district elections, ...

Impeding factors, among others:

lack of information on decision making processes and structures,  
missing structures for joining a Green district group,

lack of active support of, and interest in, people who are in the process of joining the Greens,  
dominant men, who have already been with the Greens for a long time and are unwilling to change their old male ways of structuring and leading a group or a gremium,  
long drawn discussions with long repetitive speeches of men,  
meetings in smoky back rooms of inns or pubs,  
not enough time because of family and job.

### **The conclusions**

The survey shows clearly that without the quota system of the Green Party even fewer women would occupy political functions and positions. Without this system women would have an even harder time than they currently have to rise to leading positions. As a consequence women's empowerment is also called for within the Green Party of Vienna!

The alarming findings of the study motivated the Green Party of Vienna to implement a number of internal structural measures:

More opportunities for training, counselling, further political education for women,  
Internal party discourse on measures for women's empowerment,  
Change in the culture of meetings: more efficient structuring of the meetings, rules against long drawn redundant speeches, ect.,  
Meeting times and venues that suit the needs of women as well as provision of child care services for the time of the meetings,  
Strengthening women's networking for mutual exchange of experiences, mutual support, appreciation and acknowledgement of successes and achievements, etc.  
Mentoring for active women, including encouragement and building up of more selfconfidence,  
Strategic planning of more media presence of women.

These measures have not only resulted in a significant increase of the participation of women in the Green Party of Vienna – 70% of the candidates for the city council elections on 23 October 2005 are women with a woman as the leading candidate! – but also in the improvement of the satisfaction of women within the Green Party.

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