

THE SOCIAL SITUATION OF WOMEN IN ASTRONOMY IN THE FORMER GERMAN DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC

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1. THE SOCIAL POSITION OF WOMEN IN THE FORMER G.D.R.

In the former G.D.R., the social position of women in all social branches was part of the so-called “doctrine.” The Socialist German State endeavoured to represent an image of a modern, progressive community. In this way women easily had the opportunity, if they wanted and had the required intellectual capacities, to take up a course at University or High School. There was a relatively great and wide choice of subjects. After graduation, the state really promoted any application for a job at any scientific institution and enterprise. Employment was always guaranteed.

But a further scientific career actually proceeded more slowly for women. Male colleagues, who highly outnumbered their women colleagues, were themselves not willing to grant women the same rights in their careers. Women were in general engaged in household duties and in bringing up children. These additional demands have often limited their chances to be actively involved in scientific work in the same way as men. As a result, achieving an academic post and finding far-reaching scientific appreciation, especially on an international scale, was the exception.

An additional obstacle in this respect was possibly due to women being less inclined towards political activities in the sense of the ideology of the state. Therefore, statistics show no outstanding figures despite the good starting position, in comparison with other countries.

2. THE SOCIAL POSITION OF WOMEN IN THE “NEW BUNDESLÄNDER” AFTER THE POLITICAL “CHANGE”

After the “change,” all research institutions at the “not-university” level were closed down and their staff dismissed.

After the evaluation of the entire scientific potential, the establishment of new scientific institutions started at the beginning of 1992. But the number of jobs were drastically reduced and the majority of staff members were not given a job again. Women were especially confronted by that situation. None of those formerly employed in astronomical institutions were offered a job.

Prejudice towards women as scientists was not abolished and additional professional measures were not offered to them. Neither were they represented in any foundation committees.

But women are really interested in their jobs, and that can be seen by the fact that at least three of them could get one. They were able to continue their scientific work on self-designed projects, mostly on the basis of indirect financial means.

Number of all scientists involved in Astronomy/Astrophysics:

- in the former G.D.R. 125
- portion of women 9

Number of scientists at the newly created institutes (incl. universities)

• in the New Bundesländer	78
• fraction of temporary jobs	14
• share of women in temporary jobs	4

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