

## MARCH 8, 2020: 30 YEARS LATER

**On March 8, 2020, Gender Studies, o.p.s. organized a three-day event to commemorate International Women's Day. We bring you a reflection of it in this article, in the photo gallery and in the [film report](#)<sup>1</sup>.**

The impetus for organizing the event for this year's International Women's Day and connecting it with the 30th anniversary of the free elections in 1990 arose in September 2019 on the train from the Berlin conference on „Women as Actors in the Upheavals of 1989/90 and Today“. During the four-hour journey, we agreed that we lacked meeting and sharing across generations. And not in large forums, in panel debates, in meetings or during training. We lack ordinary moments when we can debate things that interest or bother us in a safe environment where we do not have to explain why equality between women and men is an important part of our understanding of a democratic society.

That is why we decided that the Czech part of the German-Czech-Polish project on women at the time of the fall of the Iron Curtain will be about creating such ordinary moments for a mutual debate. On the eve of International Women's Day, we organized a three-day meeting, which included a panel debate, workshops, a world café and a walk through Prague. Everyone could choose to participate in all three days or pick only a small part of the program, according to their interest.

The emphasis on the word „international“ at the IWD celebration was ensured by the presence of our colleagues from Berlin, from the German organization OWEN, with which Gender Studies worked on the Women's Memory project in the 1990s, or from the women's centre Frauenzentrum Paula Panke. A representative of the international women's coalition KARAT and a journalist from Krytyka Polityczna joined from Poland. However, there were surprisingly many more international participants. This was due to a large group of Polish women living in Prague, a Frenchwoman who happened to come to Prague and wished to meet Jiřina Šiklová, or a German woman who had just arrived in Prague in time for IWD, found out about our Feminist Walk through Prague and joined us on Wenceslas Square on Sunday.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SmNnjinVcLAg>

We have prepared for you short summaries of individual days as well as photos that will allow you soak up the atmosphere or help you remember it. We also share a report, which you can watch below.

## **Friday panel debate:**

### **IWD and Feminism: why we (have nothing to) celebrate**

Friday's panel discussion moderated by Helena Skálová, Director of Gender Studies, was opened by Michaela Marksová, former Minister of Labor and Social Affairs. She emphasized that IWD was definitely not a communist holiday, even though it had been exploited as such for four decades. Perhaps a more appropriate term than „celebrate“ is therefore „to commemorate“. Marina Grasse from OWEN joined with her view of IWD in the former GDR and subsequently after the reunification of Germany. Kinga Lohmann from KARAT Coalition spoke about the challenges of IWD for today's Polish women and Blerta Sejdiya from Beat Sexism spoke about the view of the young generation from a Czech perspective. Klára Čmolíková Cozlová from Gender Studies, o.p.s. shared her slightly skeptical view of the achievements of the women's movement.

## **Workshop 1:**

### **Founding mothers, or founding women's organizations in the 1990s**

Although the potential of the 1990s seemed ideal for new and revolutionary ideas, feminism and women's issues were clearly not one of them. Despite the possibility and a certain ease with which women's organizations were being founded and relatively opened discussion frameworks in the environment of public debates and the media in the post-revolutionary years, stereotypes in society have yet to be overcome. Short-term euphoria and efforts for change (post-revolutionary period, pre-accession preparations for the EU) were not substantiated by the internalisation of the issue of equality, neither between politicians nor between women themselves. This indicates an inability to find new communication patterns that would be effective for the

women's movement, feminism, and promoting gender equality in general. Thus, the path can logically lead through changes in the communication scheme, identification of communication channels, efforts to talk to each other and to create a new language that will disrupt the social bubbles in which we operate. It is about cultivating our civil society and its development.

The workshop brought together important women associated with the beginnings of women's organizations in the post-revolutionary years. For Gender Studies, there were present the founder Jiřina Šiklová, the first employee Jana Hradílková, former directors such as Michaela Marksová or Alena Líškay Králíková and the current director Helena Skálová. They debated with ProFem founder Saša Lienau and its current director Jitka Poláková, a publicist and a writer Alena Wagnerová, or Pavla Frýdlová, the initiator of the Women's Memory project.

## **Workshop 2: Voices for women**

In the workshop, we looked for answers to the question of why it is important to have both genders represented in discussions and panels. We have formulated strategies to ensure that women engage in the public debate, even though they are often uncomfortable with speaking in public. We agreed that it is important to realize that, as women, we have a completely different perspective than men, and we bring that perspective into the debate.

By involving women in debates, their presence in public space is also normalized. With a greater involvement in public discourse comes the immediate risk of hateful comments, often targeting primarily our appearance. We are perceived as „the girls from gender or non-profit“, because that is an area that a woman can do. As soon as we get for example to the question of nationalism in our research we encounter a problem. Because it is not considered a topic „for women“. During public speaking, we should also keep in mind and emphasize that being a woman does not mean that I can speak for all women. Although a thorough preparation for a public performance also helps. It would also be helpful if the media considered that sending questions in advance was important for our preparation and that it would reduce the stress we were exposed to during the interviews.

### **Workshop 3:**

#### **Different paths, same goals**

Maybe there should be a question mark at the end of the title, because that was the spirit of the whole workshop. Do we all really follow the same goal within the feminist movement (if I dare to use this term), even if we use different paths, or are our goals a bit different? However, the delay in the program caused us to end up dealing more with the advantages and disadvantages of creating large clusters, platforms and networks. To what extent is it enriching to get off the track and abandon our ways of work, not to be so strict in our opinions in order to achieve a specific goal? Or to accept the association with someone whose work results we do not completely agree with?

One of the discussions resulted in the discovery that, despite the often complex conditions and obstacles we face, most of what we do is both enjoyable and effective. And interesting discussion was also about the activity of „debating with people“, which appeared several times and in very different contexts. Some seek this activity, enjoy it and see it as meaningful, some consider it tiring and generally useless.

We agreed that working in small groups of organizations with diverse focus, ways of working, but also political backgrounds or organizational structure has the great advantage of a more intense sense of belonging, a better defined goal and its easier visibility. On the other hand, the benefit of common platforms is a broader scope, an opportunity for learning, building together, discussing. Ultimately, it means a better chance of getting things right.

### **Workshop č. 4:**

#### **Collective Impact**

First, the participants shared the activities they had been involved in in the past and placed them on two axes: I enjoy / don't enjoy them and they have / doesn't have and impact. In the group, there were significantly dominant activities that people enjoy, most of which were also evaluated as impactful. Even so, sometimes we have to do

things that we don't like but have some impact. On the other hand, it is important to do enough things that we enjoy, otherwise our work would not make sense to us.

In the group, there also came up a personal level: how important it is to lead by example (e.g. Kasja: she introduces herself purposefully not only as a journalist but also as a mother, because motherhood is very decisive; parenthood and care are issues not only private but also public). The participants also mentioned several times that they often explain to and discuss with people around them, which is sometimes difficult.

There was also a topic of spreading the issue of gender equality to other groups (e.g. climate change organizations) and organizing lectures and workshops. Networking has proven to be a very frequent topic: it is important both for sharing experiences and learning, but it also serves as a source of support and solidarity. Networking also takes place at the international level (European Women's Lobby, KARAT Coalition, East-West Women etc.).

There was the example of the Berlin Women's Centers, which create a meeting space for migrant women and local women. Sometimes it is difficult to connect these groups, and it does not always work out (Marina). Other participants are actively involved in reporting to international organizations: e.g. UN/CEDAW (Kinga). Lobbying and advocacy work were discussed where it is sometimes necessary to also discuss with opponents, which is not easy. Joint petitions and campaigns were mentioned as examples of effective activities, e.g. a joint campaign of the Czech Women's Lobby and Amnesty International to support the adoption of the Istanbul Convention in the Czech Republic, or a Polish campaign to improve the conditions of women working in supermarkets lead together by women's organizations and trade unions.

## **World café:**

### **Discussion on selected topics „What bothers us feminists“**

The World café discussed what we, as today's activists and feminists, deal with, both at the academic level (feminism in the post-humanist era and to a large extent also the issues of intersectionality, queer and non-binary identities) and completely

practical level (antifeminist and antigender discourse, or how to grasp IWD for the next time).

The aim of the meeting was not only to discuss these topics, but also to listen to each other and understand different approaches. The binding element was the effort to cross barriers for the successful solution of the given topics.

The following ideas were voiced at the final de-briefing:

- Post-humanism can be a way to get rid of binarities and stereotypes.
- When combating anti-feminist discourse, it is important to use expert papers and databases of allied journalists, to use, for example, infographics that are less confrontational, or to declare in advance that the event is „men friendly“.
- In the case of intersectionality, it is important to focus as much as possible on the practical grasp, including the need to explain the terms and what we mean by them.
- Among the practical tips for the further direction of IWD, it was stated that it is necessary to use it as a result of year-round activist efforts, not to be limited to Prague and to get closer to the regions.