**Quotas on Norwegian boards: the five years after story**

This paper investigates to what extent the introduction of gender representation regulations for public limited companies board of directors (BODs) in Norway has been a successful way to increase gender balance and equality in the boardroom.

The gender representation regulation in Norway was introduced in 2006 with a two year implementation period requiring all BODs to have a minimum of 40 per cent of each sex by January 1st 2008. The intention from the Norwegian Government was to challenge the strong pattern of vertical sex segregation and increase equality in the private sector by creating a more balanced setting on BODs. The use of gender quotas within the private sector in Norway has been controversial and debated. Although arguments were raised by the opposing side, both in politics and other areas of society (Seierstad 2011), the Norwegian government argued for introducing gender representation rules based on several reasons related to justice and utility (Norwegian Government, 2008).

Five year after the end of the implementation period it is apparent that companies complied with the law and there seems to be an overall acceptance of the law in Norway. Nevertheless, even though descriptive data reveals significant changes for Norwegian boards and especially for women directors (Seierstad and Opsahl, 2011), and changes in terms of recruitment procedures and backgrounds of the directors are documented (Heidenreich, 2011), little knowledge exists of how the law is actually experienced by women, looking beyond the descriptive changes. As Terjesen *et al.* (2009) argue, research to date on corporate boards and gender representation has relied largely on publicly available information. Except for a few notable studies, such as Huse and Solberg (2006), research has been dominated by a tradition of focusing on corporate financial performance (Zahra and Pearce, 1989) or has been of a quantitative nature (Nielsen, 2009). They accordingly call for ‘truly innovative research’ that taps into female directors’ experience (Terjesen *et al.*, 2009: 332). In response, this article draws on qualitative data from interviews with Norwegian women who became directors as a result of the law. This study investigates the experiences of women directors five years after the introduction of the strong legal intervention that radically changed the gender composition within corporate boards and women’s opportunities.

Globally, countries are following Norway’s path of gender regulations on BODs. Recently, countries, such as France, Spain, the Netherlands, Iceland, Belgium and Finland have followed similar paths. In addition, softer initiatives have been introduced in a variety of countries such as the United Kingdom, Sweden, Canada and Australia. The EU is watching the gender balance on European boards closely, opening up the possibility of strategies from EU level if the share of women does not increase. In this regard, there are proposals to introduce quotas on European corporate boards. It is clear that lessons from Norway are important and this study, by having a qualitative investigation, will contribute to our understanding of gender dynamics on boards as well as the effects of using quotas to challenge inequality in the labour market.

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