

Shaping Gender Equality Policies in IST-ICT Research Institutions

Reflective Negotiations from the Participatory Audit to Design of Gender Equality Plans

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Abstract One of the critical issues highlighted by the existing literature on structural change for gender equality refers to the tensions and negotiations between the transformative goal of gender equality policies and the multiple ways they can be re-assumed and incorporated into existing policies and institutional goals. Institutional change can happen via small steps by exploiting existing discursive opportunities, or it can be overtly resisted and seen as a destabilizing factor for the status quo and existing power structures. The H2020 EQUAL-IST (Gender Equality Plans for Information Sciences and Technology Research Institutions) project supported 6 Universities across Europe starting from their Informatics and/or Information Systems Departments to initiate the design and implementation of gender equality plans from a field such as ICT/IST featured by extremely low representation of female researchers and full professors. The chapter analyzes the internal assessment phase and the preliminary steps of the initiated design process: based on a mixed methodology and a participatory approach to design gender equality policies, quantitative data collection has gone hand in hand with a qualitative Participatory Gender Audit: staff members and students discussed the main challenges related to gender inequalities and an idea generation process was kicked off. Discrepancies between the 'diagnostic' aspect of assessing problems and 'prognostic' ideas for measures and solutions are highlighted, leading to interesting insights as far as the fore-mentioned tensions are concerned.

Keywords Gender Equality Plans (GEPS). Structural changes. IST research organizations. Gender audits. Participatory assessment and design.



Edizioni
Ca' Foscari

Scienza e società 4

e-ISSN 2610-9948 | ISSN 2610-9158

ISBN [ebook] 978-88-6969-334-2 | ISBN [print] 978-88-6969-335-9

Open access

Published 2019-12-17

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DOI 10.30687/978-88-6969-334-2/001

1 Policy Framework and Operational Background. – 2 Assessing Gender Inequalities: an Evidence Based and Participatory Approach. – 3 Outcomes of Gender Inequalities Internal Assessment and the First Emerging Ideas for Action. – 4 Concluding Remarks.

1 Policy Framework and Operational Background

Gender equality in research has been addressed by the European Commission since 1999 through the establishment of the Helsinki Group and the first Communication on Women and Science” (European Commission 1999) Gender equality in research was already present as a policy goal across FP6 and FP7 with a gradual shift from actions aimed to making women more apt to be integrated into existing and male dominated higher education and research environments, to measures designed for ‘fixing’ academic and research institutions’. As it happened more in general for gender equality policies worldwide, the following decades marked also a stronger orientation towards gender mainstreaming, a policy approach featuring a so called ‘double’ track strategy complementing equal treatment policies and positive actions with integrating a gender approach crosscutting all policy areas (Stratigaki 2005). Overall, gender equality policies and debates have been featured by multiple discursive frameworks, often contradictory ones, in what has been described as a contested and complex ‘negotiation’ process (Bacchi, Eveline 2010).

The *Gender in Research Initiative* was a first EU wide investment to raise the awareness and enhance gender competences among researchers, until the issue was fully integrated into European Research Area policies leveraging on the argument of fostering research excellence and avoiding wasting women’s talents (EC 2012a, 2012b). Resources were made available via the 7th Framework Programme and continued under H2020 2013-2017 to fund consortia of Research Funding (RFOs) and Research Performing Organizations (RPOs) committed to implement so called “structural changes” through design and implementation of Gender Equality Plans (GEPs) (EC 2014; EIGE 2016). EQUAL-IST was approved in 2016 within this policy framework and it gathers 7 RPOs from Germany, Finland, Italy, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Portugal, Ukraine. Running for 36 months, EQUAL-IST main challenge is about approaching the specific research fields of Information and Communication Technologies and Information Systems, filling the lack of discipline-specific research and intervention in these areas (Benschop, Van den Brink 2011).

* This chapter is a revised version of a conference paper of the same authors presented at the 2nd International Conference on Gender Research (ICGR 2018).

The design of the EQUAL-IST project was guided by a theoretical framework based on socio-constructivist gender theory, considering gender as a constitutive part of organizational practices (Acker 1990; Benschop 2001; Gherardi 1994), a 'doing of gender' approach (West, Zimmerman 1987) empirically imbuing rules, procedures, social interactions and discourses. In academic contexts, as Yvonne Benschop and Marianne Van Den Brink (*ibid.*) have brilliantly demonstrated, the variety of layers impacted by gender inequalities takes the semblance of a 'seven headed dragon' to be counteracted by highly flexible and context-based strategies and tools: the 'undoing' of gender inequalities implies enacting a different vision of gender relations in academic life. EQUAL-IST has lead towards finding a sustainable impact across 4 main areas of intervention; Human Resources and Management structures -including Governance; Research Design and Delivery; Institutional Communication, Teaching and Students Services. All project activities aimed at supporting partners in the path towards carrying out internal assessments and design their GEPs in full awareness of the fact that any attempts to introduce change in institutional contexts whose power structures and dynamics are entrenched with gender inequalities, would inevitably provoke internal resistances at various levels (Lombardo, Mergaert 2013). Interestingly, scholars have also spotlighted how even requests for research and training interventions can express implicit resistance , as data and evidence gathering and/or raising awareness can be used to divert attention from more challenging actions such as changing rules and procedures (Benschop, Verloo 2006).

This paper aims at achieving an ex-post and (self) critical review of the Participatory Gender Audit processes (PGA) in EQUAL-IST to highlight its strengths and limitations. Data provided by EQUAL-IST partners on their PGA processes (i.e. Individual Gender Audit Reports structured along a common reporting template) are analyzed by a heuristic framework inspired by Lombardo and Meier's study (Lombardo, Meier 2006), highlighting how when negotiating on meanings and goals of gender equality policies, two levels of analysis are intertwined: a diagnostic and a prognostic one. The former refers to the ways gender inequalities are assessed, their background reasons and the engaged (and/or held responsible) subjects are identified. The latter entails the solutions in terms of policies, measures, actions which are proposed to tackle them. Consistency and coherence between the two is expected in policy design, although this can be addressed in a multiplicity of ways indeed. Collected statistical data and the PGA workshops themselves held during the year 2016, confirmed the involved academic organizations were severely featured by gender inequalities along the entire research and education pipeline (low representation of female among students, researchers, full professors and Dept. Managers, absence of a gender perspective applied to teaching

research and institutional communication). By clustering typologies of interventions/solutions emerging from the PGAs in two main categories, structural change interventions and preparatory interventions or soft measures, we highlight ambiguities and tensions which have emerged: on one side we assess to what extent project partners have managed to go beyond the relatively short-term agenda foreseen by a tri-annual GEP and to include in the official GEPs measures which have the potential to become structural. On the other hand, we reflect on whether the abundance of preparatory and soft measures proposed (further research and internal analysis, raising awareness, training and communication action) should be interpreted as a sign of internal resistance to change.

2 Assessing Gender Inequalities: An Evidence Based and Participatory Approach

At the end of March 2017, 10 months after the project's kick off, all engaged universities had completed their internal assessment and analysis of gender inequalities through a quali-quantitative audit methodology characterized by a strong participatory approach. From such process, a series of solutions and proposed activities to be further discussed by the management for potential inclusion in the GEPs have been selected (Sangiuliano 2017a)

In the need of crafting a gender audit methodology targeted at ICT/IST Departments and Faculties, two specific choices were guiding the methodology design process:

- a mixed methodology featured by a quantitative and qualitative approach,
- a participatory strategy able to trigger discussions, create ownership of the project's goals, identify challenges and needs in a thorough way, letting a collective idea generation process take shape.

Within EQUAL-IST, partners could benefit from having the opportunity to both collect and analyze quantitative gender disaggregated data, and foster the understanding of their internal institutional and gendered dynamics through qualitative methods (Canali 2017).

Furthermore, EQUAL-IST has been featured since the very beginning of the project design by the willingness of opting in for a participatory approach. Bottom-up push was emphasized without neglecting the importance of keeping the high and middle management levels engaged, to contrast risks typically entailed into implementing gender equality policies at large by reducing them to merely technical-bureaucratical "box-ticking" exercises (Squires 2007). This is typically the case when organizations/institutions have to comply with gender policies as they are enforced by national legislations or when

for opportunistic reasons public resources are made available to implement them. Additionally, it has been considered how accentuating participatory aspects could be more suitable to 'shake' a seemingly immobile situation in a highly male dominated environment and trigger discussions on gender equality; this was thought of being particularly suitable for a strongly discipline-oriented project, such as EQUAL-IST, targeting Research Institutions in the ICT/IST domain, where gender bias is particularly severe.

Starting from the adaptation of Participatory Gender Audit to research institutions from the GenisLAB project (Genova, De Micheli et al. 2014), the EQUAL-IST project has proceeded to customize the PGA to ICT-IST institutions based on the following assumptions:

- work systematically on the quantitative data collection and design a composite set of statistical indices;
- further simplify the original methodology keeping it focused on a set of actions such as: short preparatory surveys; individual in depth interviews with managers; a reduced number of workshops;
- provide a set of semi structured interviews grids and workshops templates as well as a set of suggested group-exercises, leaving to each partner the freedom to further adapt to their own context.

The objective of the quantitative analysis was to collect data about gender equality with focus on the ICT/IST field, and to compare it with the general situation at each university.

Extensive data collection and analysis was conducted through four main areas of interest: students, academic staff, non-academic staff and work-life balance, both at the Department/Faculty and whole University level.

The participatory tools included in the EQUAL-IST gender audit methodology consisted of individual semi-structured interview and workshops.

Semi-structured interviews with key middle and top managers at each targeted area of intervention had the goal of identifying the main weaknesses and in terms of gender equality at each institution. The methodology includes five workshops - four thematic workshops plus one final comprehensive workshop - divided as follows:

1. W1 - HR practices and management for academic staff
2. W2 - HR practices and management for technical and administrative staff
3. W3 - Research design and delivery
4. W4 - Teaching and Student services
5. W5 - Final workshop

Institutional Communication was considered a cross-cutting topic to be covered in each workshop.

Each thematic workshop was expected to involve approximately

15 participants, while at the final workshop all participants to the thematic workshops were invited.

Workshops were suggested to be gender/age/ethnicity inclusive and crosscutting the hierarchies.

- Short preliminary ex ante questionnaires were submitted to participants to the four thematic workshops with raising awareness purposes and to define a useful baseline for discussion.

The main goals of thematic workshops were:

- Raise awareness and start a self-reflection and learning process on gender in research issues at the institutional level.
- Identify the main internal gender issues and collect feedback about them from different stakeholders.
- Start thinking about possible actions to improve gender equality and about their applicability within the institution.

The final workshop was foreseen as the conclusive step of the gender audit process, to share results of challenges and identified potential solutions with all participants to the previous PGA's steps in the discussion about what would be the most suitable strategy and feasible actions to be potentially included by each RPO in their own GEPs. Only one partner, WWU in Germany, opted for replacing participatory workshops with a substitute survey, after having verified that most colleagues would not find the time to join face to face meetings.

The Gender Audits have been entirely handled by internal staff members due to a precise choice of merging the initial gender training of EQUAL-IST team members and Working Groups with a hands-on focus on delivering a PGA process in their own organizations. Two capacity building sessions have been organized to present and discuss the core elements of the Gender Audit Methodology. This action was led by an approach to gender training, which emphasizes the active experimentation- concrete experience and reflective observation steps of a learning cycle (Sangiuliano 2010, 2014).

3 Outcomes of Gender Inequalities Internal Assessment and the First Emerging Ideas for Action

Following the aforementioned methodology, the 7 RPOs conducted Participatory Gender Auditsto identify solutions, tailored to their contexts, to address gender inequalities by setting up GEPs. In total, 22 challenges were identified and 52 ideas for solutions were collected to tackle the emerging issues and proceed with the design of GEPs and its next step via a crowdsourcing experiment at each organization. (Gorbacheva, Barann 2017).

Overall, 458 participants joined the activities, interviews, participatory workshops and a substitute survey. Of these, 293 people were taking part to EQUAL-IST participatory workshops.

Workshops' groups were quite gender balanced, with men counting for more than 40% of participants although with some substantial differences among partners from FI and PT, featured by the more gender balanced teams. Although participants represented a small share of the population of the academic communities from the Departments/Faculties engaged in the project, it's good to remind how the Participatory Gender Auditing is featured as a qualitative methodology, where success indicators are the amount of collected information, the openness of the debate, the successful convergence of participants into sharing ideas on analyzing causes of gender inequalities, and identifying possible solutions setting the building blocks for future action. The figure below includes the total of participants to each activity, not distinctive attendees and shows how the academic component was the predominant one.

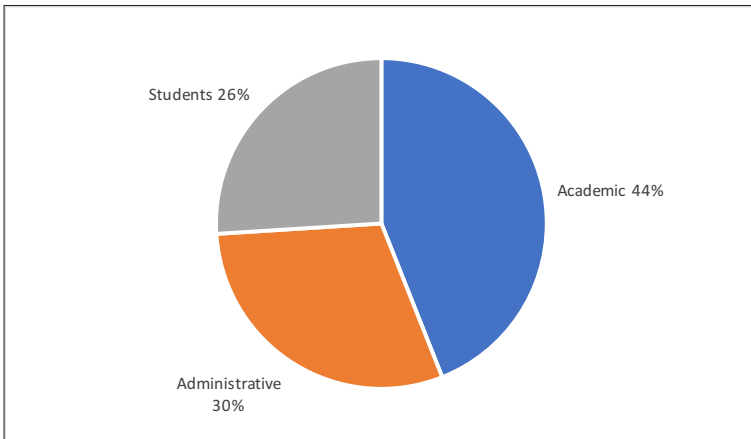


Figure 1 Total number of participants per employment type

Difficulties in motivating colleagues to participate were widespread among EQUAL-IST partners: attempts were made by motivating the audience with both online and offline activities and getting the support of Departments Directors and HR Managers, but constraints regarding the lack of time due to the limited timeframe for the crowdsourcing exercise and the internal audit in relation with the vacation period (April/May 2017) and the examinations' period limited the rates of successful engagement. In general, lack of widespread awareness on gender equality issues and how relevant-important they are for ICT-IST research was reported by all partners as a main factor at play in not reaching out to highest numbers of participants.

Analyzing the full set of emerging ideas and solutions from the workshops, it was possible to identify 22 common challenges addressed by overall 52 proposed ideas for solutions. The chart below shows how the Human Resources and Management Processes area, followed by Teaching & Students Services, got the highest shares of identified challenges and proposed solutions.

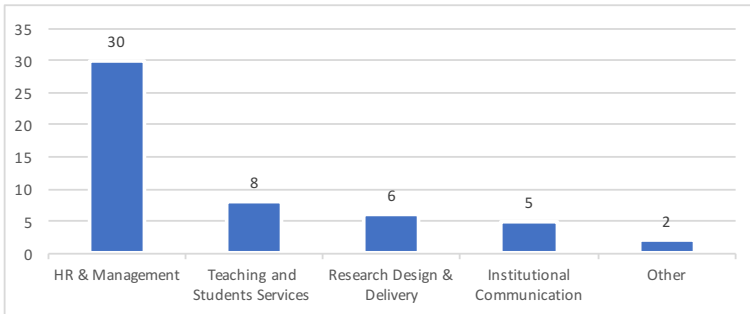


Figure 2 Proposed solutions per area of intervention

The table below illustrates the full picture in terms raised ideas/solutions clustered by Areas of intervention.

Table 1 Emerging challenges and proposed solutions per area of intervention

Main Area	Ideas/Solutions
HR & Management practices	ICT Careers presentations with focus on work life balance
	A training program on gender issues for staff and students
	Raising awareness workshops for managers
	Communicating about the opportunity for flexible working hours during the hiring process of researchers
	Making existing work life balance provisions and the work of Equality Machineries more visible
	Mentoring programs for women/parents
	Individual career/life plans between each employee and her/his superior
	On campus child care facilities
	Flexible working times; telework;
	Equal treatment provisions for single mothers
	Mentoring programs for women
	Ensure visibility of role models (existing women in apical positions)
	Raising awareness activities targeting decision makers and managers
	Job offers attracting international researchers
	Introducing target quotas to fill in professorship positions
	Internal survey/research to understand why female PhD holders didn't continue with their academic careers
	Ensure visibility to cases of inequalities and their consequences in hindering career progression, mobility etc.
	Create a Women's Network
	(raise awareness about the importance of) Increasing the share of young women in evaluation panels, committees and working groups
	Create a document which shows the career advancement criteria for each department and academic/non-academic staff
	Communicate more effectively that merit (not gender) is the selection criteria and highlight the reasons behind positive discrimination actions
	Implementing existing provisions on quotas for top positions to be assigned to the underrepresented sex when two equally qualified employees have applied
	Adjusting recruiting procedures to attract more women in ICT/IST during the recruitment process
Mentoring programs	
Recognize operational management tasks in career progression at the same level as strategic planning are	

Main Area	Ideas/Solutions
	More coordination among existing machineries
	Long term strategy by the University as far as GE is concerned
	Embed the GEP into the University Strategic approach
	Create a Gender Equality Committee
	Gathering gender disaggregated data and statistics on a yearly basis to document the main findings related to high/low numbers of students or employees and monitor how and why it changes per year
Teaching and students' services	Set up a Gender Studies Centre
	Raising awareness and training activities to research and teaching staff (and students*) on gender issues
	Include use of gender sensitive language by teachers as an indicator in the evaluation of courses
	Projects and initiatives to attract girls to ICT: University collaborating with local primary-middle schools
	Counselling high school girls to motivate them choosing ICT/IST Studies (having the RPO staff – and female professors as role models- visiting high schools)
	Upgrading/rethinking information/dissemination materials targeting perspective students
	Integrating initiatives for girls & ICT/IST into existing activities to promote enrolment to the University and/or into existing projects and info days for girls in STEM/ICT
	Create new ICT/IST Study programmes with an interdisciplinary approach to motivate more girls to apply
Research content & delivery	Funding for young women researchers
	Tutoring women researchers/encouraging researchers to apply for research funds
	Share leading responsibility with less experienced researchers
	Interdisciplinary Gender Research Centre
	Raising research unit's directors' awareness about the relevance of gender equality policies and research topics
	Web space with visibility of gender related research results & internal mapping of gender competences
Institutional communication	Establish working group on best practices in gender sensitive communication
	Improve and coordinate communication on existing activities on Gender Equality, provisions and facilities
	Raising awareness activities on gender sensitive language
	Promote women in ICT/IST success stories and dedicated events for girls
	Promote IST courses within the School conveying the idea that is interesting and relevant for both men and women
Other	Reframe gender equality policies as relevant and addressing both men and women
	Address sustainability issues already within the GEP design

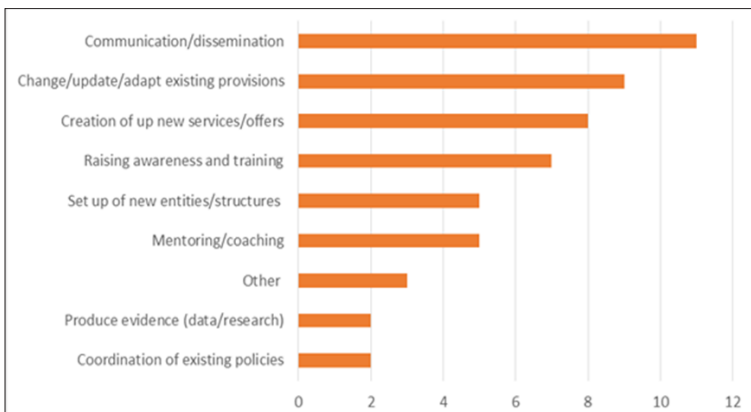


Figure 3 Types of proposed interventions

It is interesting to take a cross-sectoral look at the emerging ideas and proposed solutions: the chart above shows distribution along clusters based on a typology we designed. It spots how communication and dissemination play a leading role among the envisaged actions. Second in order we find the adaptation and change (as well as enforcement) of existing provisions, where a gender approach should be integrated (from evaluation to recruitment processes and students services etc., including all areas of interventions), followed by creation of new services, raising awareness actions (where in some cases decision makers have been set as the main target groups), creation of new structures or entities (networks, working groups, committee, centers) and the provision of mentoring and coaching services. Production of further evidence and quantitative data analysis has been also advocated as necessary, jointly with improving the coordination of existing measures and policies.

It can be noticed how dissemination/raising awareness alone constitute a large share of the proposed initiatives: this can be attributed to the initial stage of implementation of gender equality policies and it is coherent with the lack of awareness of these issues observed by all partners. At the same time, when analyzing all Gender Audits Reports, we acknowledged how these types of solutions are also better defined in terms of scope and targets than those included in the type of “Change/adapt existing provisions” which have been formulated much more vaguely. This can indicate in a way how dissemination and raising awareness actions appeared at the considered stage as the ‘easiest’ cure to be proposed, particularly in a phase and within discussion groups acting out of internal negotiations with management structures and real decision-making processes.

To further understand to what point the partners were radically addressing the structural change objectives required by the project, we further simplified our typology in two main clusters as following:

Table 2 Typology of interventions: structural change and preparatory

Structural Change	Preparatory interventions
Creation of new services and measures	Communication and dissemination actions
Change/update/adaption of existing provisions and procedures	Raising awareness and training
Creation of new structures	Production of further evidence/data/research
Mentoring & coaching services	
Coordination of existing policies	

We observed that the trend expressed by the PGA working group in EQUAL-IST has gone to the direction of a predominant number of ideas pointing at “structural changes” as the pie chart below makes clear.

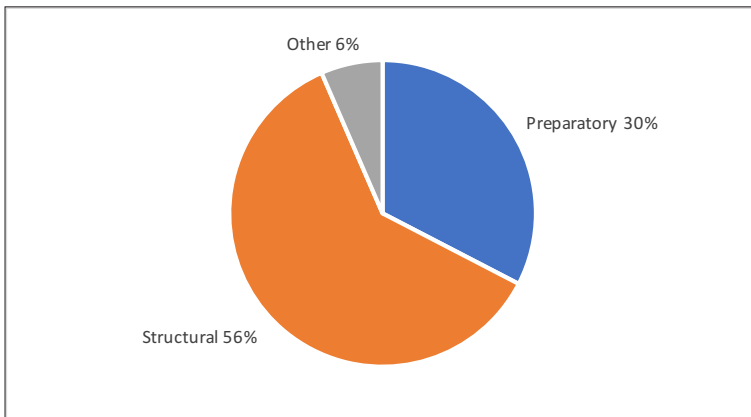


Figure 4 Number of changes per type of intervention

4 Concluding Remarks

Reflections coming from the Gender Audit processes were all started and conducted keeping ICT/IST as a focus, although discussions were often landing to broader issues. Point of departure for all partners was the acknowledgement of women under representation among academic staff being more severe in ICT/IST studies, and the same for

the ratio of girls among enrolled students. During the workshops, multiple reasons for gender inequalities were mentioned and raised, with ‘gender stereotypes’ most frequently named as roots of cultural and social constructions leading both men and women to think of STEM and ICT as a male domain.

Overall, the image of ICT/IST emerged as strongly biased and contributing to change it is identified as one of the main priorities of actions to be put in place through GEPs. All reports are strongly featured by a prevailing role attributed to culture and stereotypes when identifying root causes of inequalities and this is coherent with the high number of communication/dissemination types of proposed interventions, meaning that to a predominant type of diagnosed problem (cultural stereotypes) consistently corresponds a most frequent ‘cure’ (raising awareness, communication actions).

At the same time, such a move allows to set the reasons outside the structure and the organization, in the farther cultural domain, therefore tending to distance from structural change oriented solutions/actions.

Looking for ICT/IST specific actions among the solutions emerging from the PGAs, we realized how these mostly pertain the areas of intervention related to Teaching and (potential) Students Services, but again in a way that doesn’t affect the core mission of the RPOs and moves solutions ‘outward’ the structure: actions aimed at promoting coding since early stages of education and role models for upper secondary school girls in order to motivate and attract them towards Informatics and related discipline at a later stage were suggested by 6/7 RPOs. Although labelled among “new services/initiatives” and therefore included in the “structural change” type of actions, once again they happen to move the identified solutions outward the structure, to target a different institution (lower and upper secondary schools), even though positive impacts are expected in terms of female enrollments in the longer run.

Gender equality was confirmed from our Participatory Audit pilots as a contested site of discursive and practical tensions, as resistances were widely reported by all partners: gender equality seemed not fully understood as a relevant research dimension for STEM and ICT/IST: three ideas for solutions only were focusing on gender as a variable for ICT-IST research (i.e. Interdisciplinary Gender Research Centre; Raising research unit’s directors’ awareness about the relevance of gender equality policies and research topics; Web space with visibility of gender related research results & internal mapping of gender competences, see **[tab. 1]**). This was confirmed by impressions reported by EQUAL-IST team members during project meetings that a strong belief in the neutrality of computer science and algorithms was making difficult for their ICT-IST colleagues to grasp how a gender dimension could be applicable to their research areas.

In other cases, such as for students, the difficulty for example, an initial lack of understanding and a 'denial' type of resistance, as a tendency to consider that equality is already a fact, or defined by some partners as "a tendency to normalize gender inequalities" which is typical for younger generations.

'Diminishing/ridiculing' types of resistances were met during workshops as in particular among men, some individuals were hiding 'veiled laughing' when gender issues were presented and discussed, which typically happens when policies goals get to be ridiculed. We also found examples of a 'politicized' type of diminishing resistance confirmed by recent studies about backlashes and conservative approaches strongly criticizing gender equality policies (Köttig, Bitzan, Petö 2017):

- repeated arguments about gender inequalities as a non-relevant problem as both national policies and the University have already equality policies or statements in place, while interventions targeting women mostly are considered as discriminatory against men.
- stereotypes about gender policies labelled as 'feminist' and reported to be perceived as 'excessively based on ideological and emotional rather than rational, scientific, or legal arguments' were also expressed in discussions.

Considering the complex picture from the 7 PGAs, we conclude that the initial positive picture showing most of the proposed measures were pointing at structural changes type of interventions, needs to be counterbalanced by opposing trends emerging during the Auditing processes, such as a preference for outward-oriented actions as well as the resistances which were met along the way: continued support from and alliance with top decision makers from the Dept./ Faculty and University will be crucial to ensure successful implementation and sustainability of GEPs.

And still our findings point also at a new research area to be further investigated, the intersection between inward and outward oriented changes: an interesting set of studies on gendering innovation ecosystems (Andersson et al. 2012) has suggested how change interventions which address the two levels are best suited to generate positive feedback loops: the implementation phase of the Gender Equality Plans could be studied and analyzed in depth to understand if/to what extent the outward oriented actions with the upper secondary school systems triggered increased awareness and further inward actions towards structural change. Allocation of funds to implement them after the end of the project could be a suitable indicator to this respect.

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