

LOCAL EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES POLICIES IN THE COMMUNITY OF MADRID: CURRENT SITUATION

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This paper addresses the present gender equality policies in the municipalities of the Community of Madrid. The study focuses on the analysis of different aspects such as the introduction and development of a Gender Department, the Equal Opportunities Plans, the Domestic Violence Programs or Work and Family Programs. Other initiatives to women are included in the analysis: workshops and cultural activities and training services for employees. The approach used in the study relates different geographical variables with the information about gender local policies, mainly to know how the last ones can contribute to the women empowerment and to the achievement of strategic gender interests.

This paper has four parts. The first one introduces the gender local policy concept, making also reference to the theoretical approach and to relevant literature. Secondly we will address the methodology and the geographical context of the analysis. Subsequently, we will review the most outstanding results in the analysis, by distinguishing between policies with high level of institutionalization such as Women or Gender Local Departments and Gender Equality Action Plans and specific actions, these last ones small in magnitude. A summary of results and some lines of debate considered essential will be introduced in the last section of the paper.

The Spanish Constitution of 1978 (Title VIII, Chapters I and II) specifies that the municipality is one of the territorial units for political action. Later its tasks and powers will be specified in the Law 7/1985 (Ley Reguladora de las Bases de Régimen Local; Law Regulating the Local Regime Databases), turning the municipality into the framework for promoting certain activities and providing public services, many of them related to the everyday needs of women, in their role as caretakers of home and family.

Policies on Equal Opportunities between Women and Men and Gender policies mainly consist of the implementation of corrective and countervailing measures, all of them aimed at eliminating gender discrimination that limits women the opportunity to access and develop their capacities in any political, social, economic, cultural, emotional, educational, etc., sphere. Some of the main equal opportunities actions developed by Equality Policies are the Gender

Equality Action Plans, that will be later implemented in many small actions and activities, especially in the local level. It also must be noted that the role of the State in overcoming gender inequalities has been a major controversy within feminism, where the discourse and practice have fluctuated from the adoption of a state liberal theory to a left handed discourse, criticizing as well the role that the State may have in reproducing the male dominance hierarchies. Any way, this is a process with numerous negotiations, where there are many powers clashing; it is also a long dialectics matter, in which we can found advances and regressions, where different points of view of the problem must be taken into account, where numerous ideologies, perspectives, rationalities, ways of evaluation and problem definitions must be considered.

The methodology used in this research in order to evaluate the degree of territorial implementation of gender policies will use basically analytical feminist categories such as the distinction between gender roles and the concept of empowerment, used repeatedly in the mentioned literature of this paper. The main questions to measure the Gender Plans and actions will be targeted to see their contribution to improve Gender Strategic Interests. The key questions are: to what kind of gender needs and aspirations does the municipality policies contribute? These policies are intended for improving Gender Practical Needs or Gender Strategic Interests? All these actions contribute to the women empowerment? This methodology belongs to the identification and implementation of development projects in Developing Countries, following the premises of the GED framework (Gender and development), that was firstly proposed by Molineaux, 1985, Young, 1988 y Moser, 1989. We think that the proposal of these authors can be used as well to evaluate any initiative related with gender equality, as we demonstrate in our analysis.

Data collection starts with the identification of any gender activities developed in municipalities, such as the creation of a Women Department or any other specific action as in example, a workshop for women. We have collected all information about gender policies in municipalities over 5.000 inhabitants of the Regional Community of Madrid. The Municipality of Madrid Capital has not been enclosed in a part of the analysis because of its big magnitude, very difficult to compare with any other local territories. The Main source for data has been the different local WebPages, in which gender actions and policies are introduced, described and offered to women.

Our Research has identified many different gender policies in the local spheres. Some of them have a very institutional nature such as the Departments of Women, of Gender or of Equal Opportunities between Women and Men. Other ones depend on the initiative, ideology, gender sensitivity and training of the local policy makers. It is important to mention the main role played by the Equal Opportunities Plans, because of their holistic approach, recently focused in gender mainstreaming.

From a geographical point of view not all local governments have implemented their own Equal Opportunities Plans. Only 52 of 79 municipalities over 5.000 inhabitants have developed this kind of documents, and only 25 of these were in effect in the mid of 2011, during this research. Geographically, Madrid Capital and the municipalities of its Metropolitan Area have mostly implemented Equality Plans. By contrast, Gender policies have been less considered in small local territories, with low budgets where, paradoxically, the male chauvinists attitudes are very strong. Another noteworthy aspect is that some Equal Opportunities Plans have been approved by «commonwealths of municipalities of Social Services», solving the problem of lack of economic resources or the small population size.

Results concerning different detailed gender actions show three main activities groups. International Day of Women (97.7% of municipalities have this kind of event), publicizing activities against gender violence (93.2%) and workshops or small seminars or training courses for women, some of these ones with empowerment contents. Other groups of activities ongoing are also relevant, such as the activities for Reconciling Parenthood and Employment (65%) and the Gender Training for schools. Specific activities, on our opinion very strategic in achieving equity between women and men, such as policies to promote employment for women, and that directly promote strategic gender interests, have a smaller presence (some of these only are in 38.8% of the municipalities).

A critical aspect in local public gender policies is their evolution through the last decades from a welfare point of view to a policy integration process that characterizes the essence of gender mainstreaming. Our research has identified a double discourse in Gender Policies. The Mainstreaming concept appears in several official documents, such as in the Equal Opportunities Laws or in the Equal Opportunities Plans, however specific municipal actions reflect very few efforts to make mainstreaming effective. Consequently, we think gender training is very necessary among the technicians and administrative staff of the Municipalities. It is as well very important improving coordination between different municipal Departments and the preparation of information that reflects entirely the local available resources to women, sometimes very unknown by them.

Considering the geographic presence of gender local policies in the Community of Madrid, the majority of Municipalities has some kind of them, even though the development degree of those ones is very heterogeneous. In this sense, the research shows an intense correlation between development level of policies and demographic size of the municipality, rather this development must be also related to the greater availability of economic resources of a crowded place.

On the other hand, our analysis has demonstrated how municipalities with similar population size and economic recourses have very different gender policies implementations, and this fact is due to the specific gender politic action of the members of the municipal authority, mainly to the Mayor's will. We suggest that ideology has been important in developing some policies, at least in the Spanish political local context after the 1978 Constitution. Firstly gender policies appeared in some local contexts governed by the left-wing parties, such as PSOE (Spanish Socialist Party) or IU (United Left). However, in the present time, after more than thirty five years of Democracy, most of the politic parties present gender issues in their election programs, some of them by political beliefs, some by political correctness. Nonetheless, we would like to insist again that the development of gender local policies at a given time in Spain has been due to a decision of the local government team, probably driven by a person with awareness and training in gender issues.

The methodological limitations of this research have prevented assessing some key aspect that certainly could complement it, such as the study of municipal budgets destined to gender issues. Similar studies to this one have pointed out the scarce endowment of the equality actions in the budgets, which significantly limits the implementation and the effectiveness of gender measures. Undoubtedly, and specially for Spain, these budget limitations are currently deepening due to the financial and economic crisis.