

MAINSTREAMING GENDER STUDIES NETWORK IN HUMAN, SOCIAL AND LEGAL SCIENCES (GENET)

1. Social change and equality between women and men

Social transformations occurred in Spain during the 20th century have had an impact on the shaping of new gender roles and on the more and more current debate on several issues concerning the feminine and masculine changing identity. Women consolidation in the working environment has meant a considerable “social revolution” in both the private and public spheres, which has had accentuated consequences in regard to relationships with males. In fact, after half a century of important changes in feminine condition, the issue about the new place women have in western societies and also about their relations with men is raised at different levels.

In the last 25 years Spanish women have led the greatest progress in their history. However, social and economic reality does not show yet the complete and effective equal rights that the Constitution of 1978 grants women as part of their citizenship statute. Those “equal opportunities” policies that were implemented during the 1980s and 1990s aimed to remove legal, economic, social, cultural and power obstacles, so that women could improve their presence in the public sphere. Nevertheless, these policies were not able to put an end to inequality. One of the reasons for this is that the access to the public world has not changed, yet, feminine responsibilities in the private sphere. This is why the new century witnesses a new axis in regard to equality policies: the implementation of “mainstream” measures (employment, education, health, information society, rural development, housing, etc.), that promote gender role change.

The “*Acuerdo de Consejo de Ministros* (Agreement of Cabinet) whereby measures to encourage equality between women and men are introduced” (Orden Pre/525/2005, 7 March) compiles some of the most evident features of this inequality: higher feminine than masculine unemployment; significant wage difference for the same job; family responsibilities assumed almost exclusively by women and persistent obstacles to cope with both family and professional life; an unbearable number of women who have been victims of gender violence and, in short, the discrimination of women throughout history in a society that continues without offering equal opportunities to every male or female citizen (BOE (Spanish Official Gazette), 8 March 2005, p.8112).

After this preliminary regulation, the *Ley Orgánica para la Igualdad Efectiva de Mujeres y Hombres* (Fundamental Law for the Effective Equality between Women and Men) (3/2007, 22 March) was passed. This law establishes, in its exposure, the need for a “legal action aimed to fight all signs of direct or indirect sex discrimination that still exist and to promote real equality between women and men, therefore removing the social obstacles and stereotypes that impede its achievement” (BOE (Spanish Official Gazette), 23 March 2007, p.12611). Due to its status as Fundamental Law, its enactment implies a modification of several laws and requires that all regulations released by the Civil Service are previously submitted to a Gender Impact Report (*Informe de Impacto de Género*), that will analyse how its implementation could affect women and men. We are witnesses of a legal reform of deep implications in public and private life as a whole in our country. The basis of this Law are the following principles: “**Positive action**”, that involves implementing compensatory measures in order to hasten the progress towards a full equality, based on the assumption that treating equally those who are unequal perpetuates inequality; “**Balanced representation**” whereby a sufficiently significative presence of both sexes is assured in bodies and posts of responsibility; as well as “**Gender Mainstreaming**”, that is a concept introduced by the United Nations World Conference on Women held in Nairobi in 1985 and in Beijing in 1995. It establishes an ensemble of measures to be implemented in all spheres of social activity in order to put an end to gender inequality.

2. CSIC (Spanish National Research Council) and research about Gender

CSIC’s transformation into a Civil Agency and the foundation of the Centre for Human and Social Sciences (*Centro de Ciencias Humanas y Sociales, CCHS*) are two new realities that contribute to promote synergies between research groups of different specialities, that work in close collaboration with universities and government public bodies. Thus, the development of a mainstream research based on the approach of multidisciplinary groups and networks focused on research projects directed towards researching complex problems with a far-reaching social effect is required. This task meets the purposes included in the VII Research Frame Program for Socio-economic Sciences and Humanities (*VII Programa Marco de Investigación para el área temática 8*), that also comprises the new strategic plans of CSIC’s Area of Humanities and Social Sciences and CCHS itself.

Science and Culture, as other Public Institutions, play a very important role in the symbolic building of sexual identity. The unequal situation between women and men, their different roles as active characters in research, as well as cultural creation, contribute to reproduce and establish the keys whereby we can nowadays recognize gender identity in social imaginary: masculinity, femininity and its numerous variants, as well as its different connections to power. A quantitative and qualitative increase in the feminine *agency* in branches such as research, teaching, social communication and knowledge transfer will thus help to promote the change (and exchange) of traditional gender roles. The need to analyse these issues thoroughly and from a “mainstreaming” perspective is particularly urgent in the new European Research and Higher Education Area.

In this sense, it is also as relevant our current legal system, which establishes the need to boost the development of an equal thought and an education in favour of an effective equality between women and men; and all this, using the pertinent methods and procedures that will help to promote the knowledge society and at the same time will maximize the contributions of all its qualified human resources. In-depth analysis of the basis of our social structure, researching the complex causes of inequality between genders meets the priorities stated by the *Ley Orgánica para la Igualdad Efectiva de Mujeres y Hombres* (Fundamental Law for the Effective Equality between Women and Men) (3/2007, 22 March), chapter II (articles 23-25). Moreover, this Law states the encouragement of researching and teaching on the scope of equality between women and men, in three key lines of action: elaborating studies and researches specialized on the subject; creating specific postgraduate courses and including teaching on the subject of equality between women and men in the pertinent university *curricula*.

The establishment of a Gender Studies Network, promoted from CSIC and with the collaboration of around thirty Research Universities, Centres and Institutes of the whole State, hence answers to a clear social demand, the opening of research and teaching to the changing realities of modern societies, and to a recent legal imperative, product of the equal rights principles stated by the Constitution (and by the United Nations International Bill of Human Rights). One must bear in mind, in this respect, that gender inequality is currently considered as a country’s development index, as well as a source of economic wealth and a productivity and innovation engine.

3. *Aims of the Network*

Mainstreaming Gender Studies Network in Human, Social and Legal Sciences (*Red Transversal de Estudios de Género en Ciencias Humanas, Sociales y Jurídicas*, GENET) aims to promote collaboration between specialists in different fields in this area, such as Law, Political Science, Sociology, Economics, Demography, Philosophy, Anthropology, History, Philology..., in order to research into the causes and outline of gender inequality. Likewise, on the one hand, it intends to find transformation keys for social organizations that support this type of discrimination and, on the other, encourage the highest involvement and joint responsibility of men and women in their public and private roles. GENET has the purpose of directing initiatives, coordinating enough critical mass of each speciality as well as highlighting and spreading the researches done up to now, so that they reach their end users: Ministries and Autonomous Administrations, Departments of Postgraduate Courses and other courses such as Ph.D. or MA, Institutes for Teacher Training, Foundations, Companies, etc.

The *mainstreaming purpose* of this Network is the most suitable for tackling the analysis of a complex problem, whose solution will undoubtedly imply significant structural changes in society as a whole. The main purpose is to find an answer to current social and legal demands, joining the expert knowledge of several nodes of specialists, initially in the field of Human, Social and Legal Sciences. As for the analysis of a complex scientific problem, multidisciplinary collaboration avoids the dispersion of efforts and contributes to the common use of the existing infrastructure and knowledge in each of the nodes that form it. The purpose is hence to increase corporate capital and therefore fully integrate women, with all their abilities, into the productive system and more specifically into the Spanish (and European) R&D, dealing successfully with the challenge of increasing our economic productivity and our scientific and technological innovation capacity.

The research combines both teaching and educating. The rest of activities involved in social communication and knowledge transfer, deriving from the Network, will hence contribute to eliminate sex discrimination in the political, civil, working, economic, social and cultural spheres, and therefore promote multidisciplinary knowledge for gender identity and for the current social situation between women and men as well as contributing to offer possible alternatives of public action in order to put an end to these type of inequalities. This purpose meets the aim that the research

describes in Socioeconomic Sciences and Humanities (subject matter 8) within the VII Frame Programme of the European Union.

Members of the Network agree with a common approach: to tackle the research in their speciality from a *Gender perspective*, which is a concept that implies the sociocultural construction of sexual identity in a defined espace and time. Social and cultural differences that determine the meaning of being a man or woman in each place and period were revealed as very productive keys of the analysis in Social and Human Sciences since the 1960s, within the Anglo-Saxon and French academic context, and during the last decades of the last century in our country. Just like other analytical concepts of a bigger tradition, such as social class, national and/or ethnic identity, belonging to a generation, or geographical determination, gender has proved to be an important variable within the theoretic and historic analysis of complex social issues.

Putting into practice a Gender perspective implies approaching the issues related to the definition of sexual identity, and moreover, in the context of current inequality, giving priority to the attention given to women as object of study of the different disciplines and therefore, highlighting their contributions to the past and present social processes, and focusing the analysis on their specific problems. This also implies pursuing the goal of promoting the feminine *agency* in research, hence contributing to the fact that women are seen as main figures and not only as objects of study, which are uniquely approached from male researcher's points of view. To sum up, it implies questioning the androcentric perspective on which scientific epistemology and cultural creation have been based on, thus reconsidering aims, methods and techniques of research in every field.