**Diversity in Modern Society
Making Inclusion a Central Strategy in Our Universities**

Academia in the Mirror

Methods and tools for promoting academic reflexivity in the university policies for gender equality.

The case of the European project Erasmus+ SMILE
(Social Meaning Impact through LLL Universities in Europe).

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UNICA
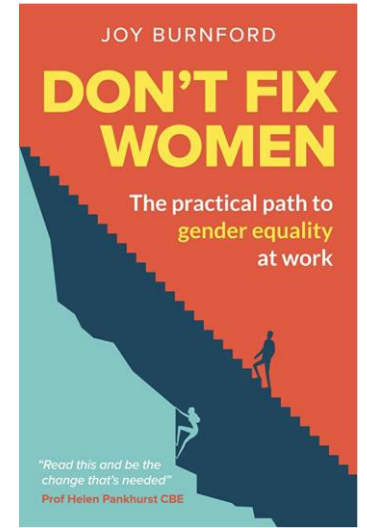COMITATO UNICO DI GARANZIA

UniCa - Università degli Studi di Cagliari

In the general framework of **adapting the policies and operational architecture** of HEIs to the directives coming from the **EU Commission** regarding the fight against all forms of discrimination and (horizontal and vertical) gender-based segregation, European universities have been called to urgently **rethink their strategic plans**.

Compulsory adoption of a Gender Equality Plan by 2022 as an essential requirement to be able to apply to calls for research funding in the Horizon and ERC programmes.

This process of **"induced" and accelerated adaptation** has not always been able to count on **adequate time** to be able to stimulate a **reflection shared** not only by top governance, but by all the populations that make up the university community (teaching and research staff, technical administrative staff, students).

Academic Performativity: did it generate a sufficiently strong awareness of the relevance of the issues of promoting diversity and social inclusion to initiate a cultural and organizational change of a structural nature, sustainable and continuous, and not just superficial?

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In this perspective, the possibility of **accessing expert knowledge**, and in particular of being able to count on **scientifically valid tools** created through documented expertise in the field of education and scientific research at an academic level, constitutes:

a) A valuable **support for self-reflecting** regarding the way of addressing and enabling diversity in terms of organizational well-being

b) A valuable **comparative advantage for the competition in the HEIs' market**, in terms of accountability, ranking and attractiveness for researchers and students.

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The Project SMILE

Erasmus+ KA3 Social inclusion and common values
621433-EPP-1-2020-1-BE-EPPKA3-IPI-SOC-IN

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Who? The **European Erasmus+ project SMILE** (*Social Meaning Impact through LLL Universities in Europe*), within the KA3 Social inclusion and common values program (621433-EPP-1-2020-1-BE-EPPKA3-IPI-SOC-IN), coordinated by EUCEN and developed by a large network of partners from all over Europe.

How? Along its almost three years of life has had the objective of responding to this **need for reflexivity and know-how in the field of inclusive learning**, by developing, testing and implementing **innovative tools** that improve the way HEIs deal with diversity and social inclusion.

What? In particular, the **area of gender equality**, declined on the dimension of women leadership in HEIs, constitutes one of the three pillars on which the project is working, in close connection with 2 other factors of potential inequality and disadvantage, in **an intersectional key: migrant background and low socio-economic status.**

Learners with migrant background

Women leadership in HE with a focus on diversity management
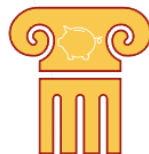
Learners with low socio economic status

SMILE – Social Meaning Impact through LLL Universities in Europe

http://smile.eucen.eu

eucen
european university continuing education network

Partners

eucen · eSU · JGU JOHANNES GUTENBERG UNIVERSITÄT MAINZ · Maynooth University

UNIVERSITY OF TURKU · L-Università ta' Malta

Fundació Solidaritat UNIVERSITAT DE BARCELONA · notus · solidar FOUNDATION

SMILE intends to harvest the expertise of civil society organisations and individuals and include their experiences in the SMILE tools.

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SMILE Outputs

Diversity Audit Tool

To support universities in self-reflecting and assessing their commitment to diversity and social inclusion. The tool has been tested and continuously improved through a peer audit process that involved a total of 20 universities

3 CPD Courses

One for each SMILE pillar, addressed to university staff, developed and tested via a bottom-up approach (involving role models, representatives of indirect beneficiaries, NGOs and community groups) with the aim to give voice to the extensive experience of professionals, volunteers, parents, in addition to current and potential learners.

Policy operational action plan

Based on the perspectives and experiences collected during the project, to serve as a guide to support universities fulfilling their commitment to diversity and social inclusion and targeted to three different types of stakeholders: HEI top management, Policy Makers and Civil Society

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What impact have the **SMILE tools** had in **strengthening reflexivity** in the academic field, in order to highlight gaps to fill and potential areas to develop?

Two analytical levels:

a) A **case-grounded empirical level**: the **University of Cagliari (Italy),** as a partner of the project network, who - throughout the SMILE life cycle - tested tools specific to gender equality between 2022 and 2023 and worked in partnership with academic staff at **Maynooth University (Ireland)**.

b) A **theoretical level**, focused on questioning, thanks to the mentioned tools, **six "myths" and "syndromes"** that need to be debunked once and for all in the way in which **in general Academia**, as a social world, tends to think and reproduce itself:

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1. **Audit Diversity Model** (tested at UNICA in June 2022)

a) Improvement of **Alias Identity Regulation** (September 2023)

b) More intersectional definition of the **statute of the first Interdisciplinary Center for Studies and Research on Gender Issues** at the University of Cagliari, called CEING (June 2023)

c) Introduction of the figure of the **trusted advisor** in policies to combat gender violence, sexism and harassment inside UNICA (coming soon)

2. **Continuous Professional Development Course on "The Glass Ceiling ain't broken"** (tested at UNICA in September-October 2022)

a) Inclusion in the program of the **first inter-doctoral transversal course** for all Phd students of every disciplinary field entitled "**Gender Equality in the Academic Context and Research: Policy Tools and Strategies**" (since April 2023)

b) Leverage for the proposal of a **mentoring program for newly hired researchers** and those in the early stages of their career (coming soon)

c) Proposal for the application of the tool as part of the training and capacity building activities envisaged by the **European Universities' alliance EDUC-Share**, of which UNICA is a partner (from December 2023)

3. **Policy Operational Action Plan** (tested at UNICA in May 2023)

a) As inspirational guidelines for the drafting of UNICA's **candidacy for the European Commission "Human resources strategy for researchers" Award**, for the institutions which make progress in aligning their human resources policies to the 40 principles of the Charter & Code, based on a customized action plan/HR strategy (submitted in October 2023)

b) As a content for **workshop** activities provided in favor of the **Third Sector (Civil Society) Forum** of Sardinia Region (November 2023)
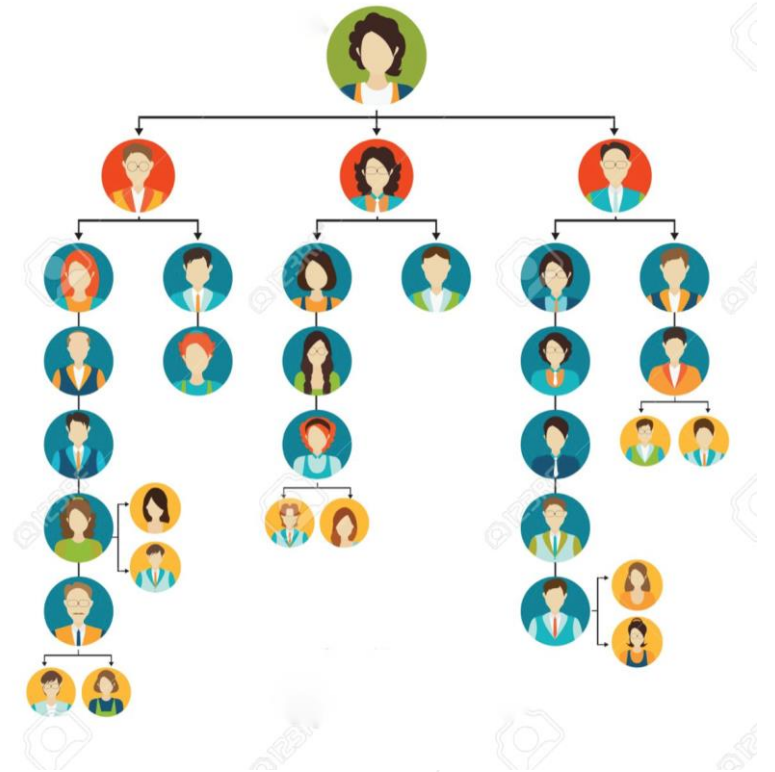
**Vertical Segregation: Challenges and Strategies
6 Myths and Syndroms that need to be Debunked**

- The Myth of the **Eternal «First Woman Ever»**

- The Myth of the **Trade-Off between Merit and Positive Actions**

- The Myth of the **«Return to Nature»**

- The **Ivory Tower** Syndrome

- ***Cuius Regio Eius Religio*** Syndrome
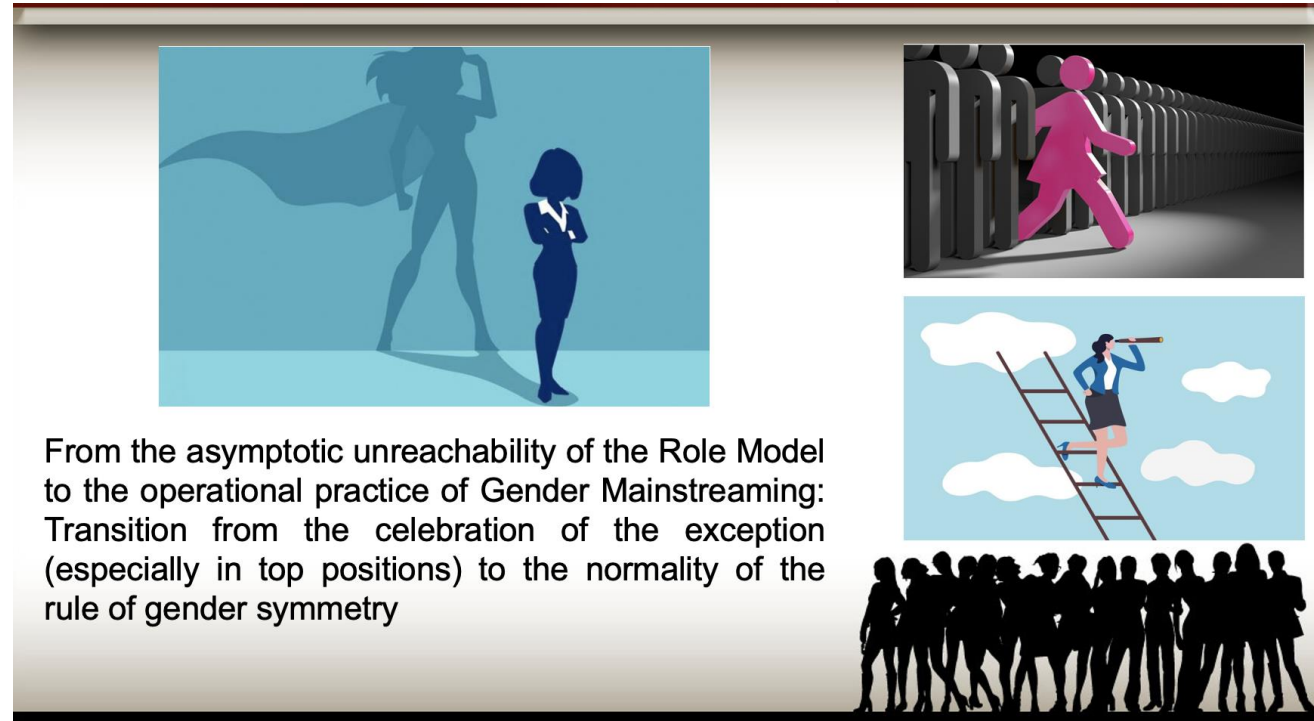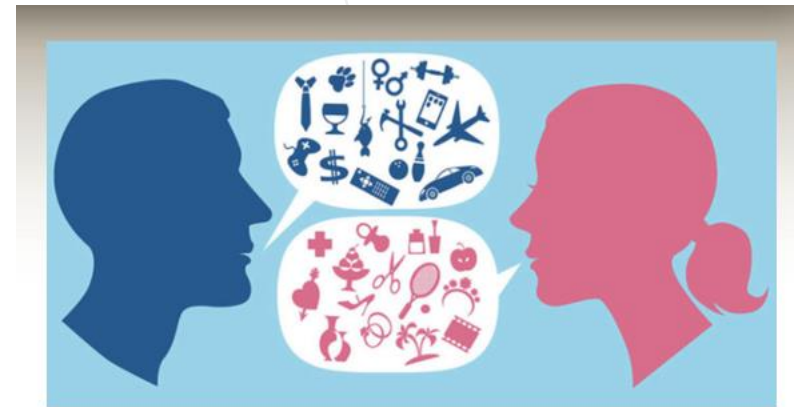
- The **Box Ticking** Syndrome

1. The Myth of the eternal «First Woman Ever»

When will the exception become the rule?

It would be necessary to go beyond the syndrome of the «first woman ever» in every field, even in academia: in Italy the first woman president of the National Research Council or the first Prime Minister have just been appointed, at UniCa the first female rector has just finished her term of office and in general we still talk about the first women Nobel Prize for STEM fields and so on.

We are in 2023: the time to **pass from the gratification for the exceptions to the normality of the rule of symmetry between men and women** in top positions, also and especially in the world of HE, has now arrived!

From the asymptotic unreachability of the Role Model to the operational practice of Gender Mainstreaming: Transition from the celebration of the exception (especially in top positions) to the normality of the rule of gender symmetry

Smile 2. The Myth of the Trade-Off between Merit and Positive Actions

"*Excellence is not a variable given in nature, which only needs to be measured,* and who the excellent men and women are depends on the relationships between the sexes in the scientific community and in society. It is possible to work to change the judges, and above all to **adopt different selection criteria and different parameter**s" (Addis, 2008)

Belief in a **dichotomy between achieving equity and excellence:** *e.g. ambiguous use of bibliometrics in evaluations (Bhalla, 2019). «While on the one hand bibliometrics seem to reduce the discretion of the evaluators and therefore also the distortions due to gender stereotypes or discrimination, on the other hand, **the choice of indicators to use is never neutral,** and can lead to direct or indirect discrimination: for example, there are obvious differences in age (think of the h-index), number of authors, topic (think of mainstream versus frontier and interdisciplinary research), but also less obvious a priori differences based on gender, in particular on the number of publications and the consequent number of citations (Larivier et al., 2013). In Italy, these differences are reflected for example in the indicators of the ASNs and the VQR. (Montorsi, 2019) with a further attention: the repeated application of criteria that present even small gender differences can lead over time to strong distortions* (National Conference of Equality Bodies of Italian Universities, 2020)
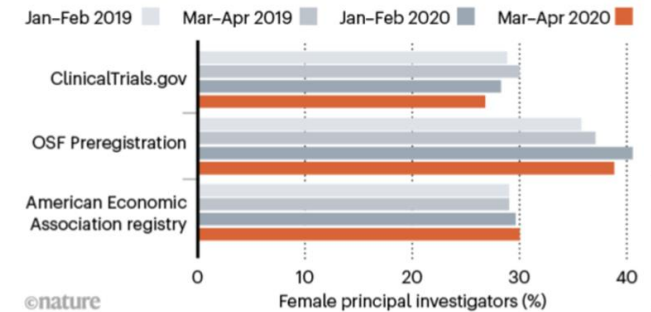
3. The Myth of the «Return to Nature»

- (Re)**Essentialisation of Gender Moral Careers** as a crisis and emergency management strategy (e.g. gender impact of the Covid-19 pandemic)

- **Production (Scientific?) vs Reproduction (Social)**

- (Not so **Smart)-Working**: overlays, invasions, tracking, atomization

- Smartworking or **Trojan Horse** for reproducing traditional gendered functions (role specialization-complementarity)

- **Academic «care-work»**

FEWER NEW PROJECTS
Women are registering a smaller proportion of research projects than before the pandemic, according to an analysis of registered-report repositories.

Jan–Feb 2019   Mar–Apr 2019   Jan–Feb 2020   Mar–Apr 2020

ClinicalTrials.gov

OSF Preregistration

American Economic Association registry

0   10   20   30   40
Female principal investigators (%)

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P. Vincent-Lamarre, C. R. Sugimoto and V. Larivière *Nature Index* https://go.nature.com/2XhxqxR (2020).

Smile 4. The Ivory Tower Syndrome

- When building a leadership, there is the need/opportunity to **relate to the local context**, maintaining a **national and international scope**

- Adoption of an **inclusive and participatory approach in the definition, implementation and evaluation of strategic tools for gender equity**, through the involvement of multiple actors representing all the populations that make up the University's social body: teaching and research, technical-administrative and librarian staff, student body.

Smile 5. Cuius Regio Eius Religio Syndrome

- Need/Opportunity for coherent **Guidelines on a European and national scale**

- **Flexibility** adaptable to specific territorial contexts

- **Comparative and networking aptitude** rather than strong competition

- **Collection of "best practices"** from other national and international universities in order to define valuable benchmarks and adopt effective indicators to measure progress in promoting gender equity within the University
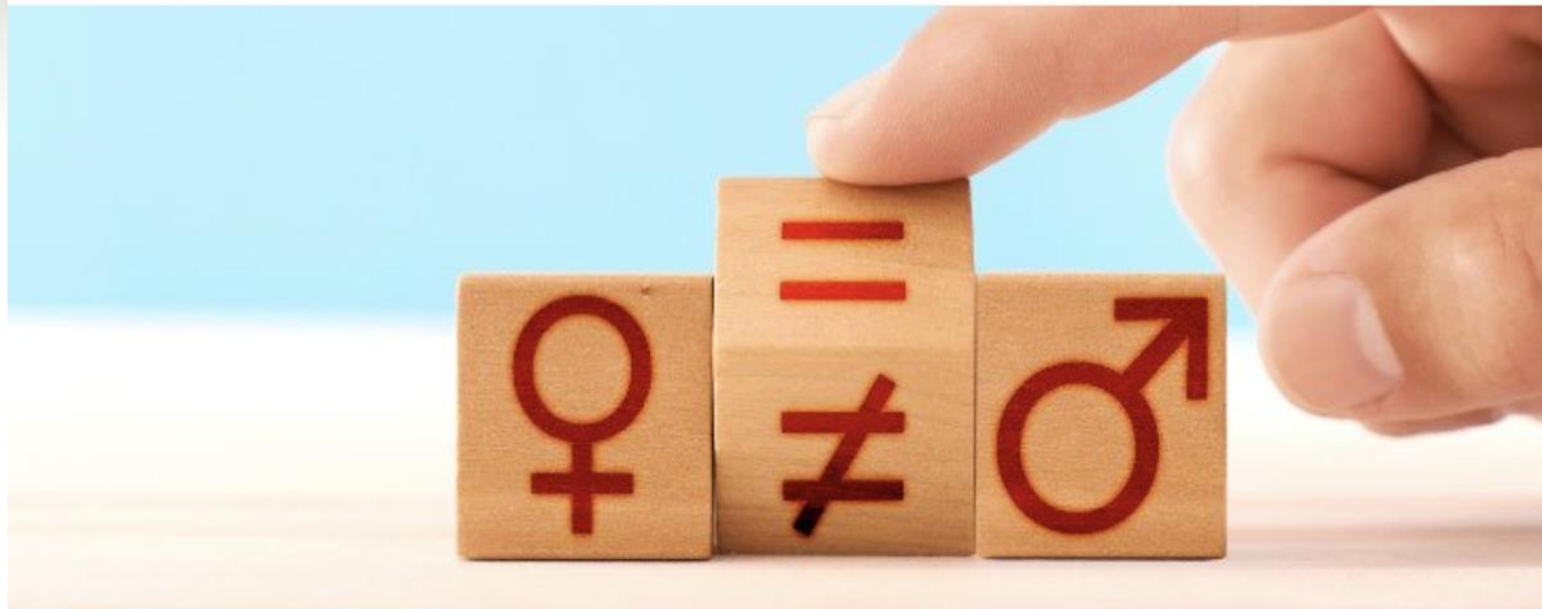
6. The Box Ticking Syndrome

- From **Formal Fulfillment to Political Strategy**

- From Bureaucratic **Ritualism to** Commitment

- **Sustainability** in terms of dedicated financial and human resources

- **Monitoring** of strategic actions

- On-going and ex-post **evaluation** of the results achieved,

- Awareness and ability (and willingness) to **adjust or change target(s).**

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THANKS A LOT FOR YOUR ATTENTION!