Negotiating change for gender equality: identifying leverages, overcoming barriers[1][2]

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Abstract. Introduction. Institutional change through gender equality plans is today the dominant approach to promoting gender equality in higher education and research. Building on our experiences as "technical support partners" in several EU-funded projects, we reflect on how change is negotiated in a variety of contexts. **Objectives.** Theoretically, using Feminist Institutionalism and the Science and Technology Studies concept of the trading zone, our objective is to analyse institutional negotiations among various, differently positioned actors with diverse backgrounds, value systems and negotiating power. From a practice-oriented perspective, our aim is to demonstrate typical challenges, suggest pathways towards solutions, and identify specific negotiation skills which underscore the capacity-building needs of change agents. **Methodology.** For our analysis, we have selected eight information-rich case studies through purposive theory-based sampling, illustrating the different transactions in the trading zones, based on our prior knowledge of the circumstances. The methods we draw on are primarily participant observation and textual analysis of project documents. **Results.** The selected theoretical combination allows us to identify leverages, ways to overcome barriers and the required skills and competences. Specifically, we underscore the use of participatory and co-creation techniques, strategic framing, spotting and using windows of opportunity, and wide mobilisation of stakeholders. We highlight key features of the change process, including its processual and incremental nature, the need for constant negotiation and the capacity-building needs of change agents. **Contribution.** With this analysis, we contribute, firstly, to the understanding of organisational change by identifying concrete barriers and opportunities as well as considering the ways in which a shared representation of gender equality is developed. The second, theoretical contribution lies in combining Feminist Institutionalism and the concept of the trading zone, which allows us to bring to productive dialogue issues of power, processuality and the need to address both material and discursive enactments of change processes.
Keywords: gender equality; institutional change; EU policy; capacity-building; trading zone.

[es] Negociar cambios para la igualdad de género: identificar apalancamiento, superar barreras

Resumen. Introducción. El cambio institucional a través de planes de igualdad de género es hoy en día el enfoque predominante para promover la igualdad de género en la educación superior y la investigación. Basándonos en nuestras experiencias como "socios de apoyo técnico" en varios proyectos financiados por la UE, reflexionamos sobre cómo se negocia el cambio en una variedad de contextos. **Objetivos.** Desde una perspectiva orientada a la práctica, nuestro objetivo es demostrar los desafíos típicos, sugerir caminos hacia soluciones e identificar habilidades de negociación específicas que subrayan las necesidades de desarrollo de capacidades de los agentes de cambio. **Metodología.** Hemos seleccionado ocho estudios de caso ricos en información a través de un muestreo intencional basado en la teoría, que ilustran las diferentes transacciones en las zonas de transacción, en base a nuestro conocimiento previo de las circunstancias. Los métodos que utilizamos son principalmente la observación participante y el análisis textual de los documentos del proyecto. **Resultados.** La combinación teórica seleccionada nos permite identificar capacidad de influencia, formas de superar barreras y las habilidades y competencias requeridas. Específicamente, destacamos el uso de técnicas participativas y de co-creación, el encuadre estratégico, la detección y uso de ventanas de oportunidad y una amplia movilización de las partes interesadas. Destacamos las características clave del proceso de cambio, incluida su naturaleza procesual e incremental, la necesidad de una negociación constante y las necesidades de creación de capacidad de los agentes de cambio. **Contribución.** Contribuimos, en primer lugar, a la comprensión del cambio organizacional identificando barreras y oportunidades concretas, así como considerando las formas en que se desarrolla una representación compartida de la igualdad de género. El segundo aporte, teórico, radica en combinar el institucionalismo Feminista y el concepto de zona de transacción, lo que nos permite llevar

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al diálogo productivo temas de poder, procesualidad y la necesidad de abordar tanto las representaciones materiales como discursivas de los procesos de cambio.
Palabras clave: igualdad de género; cambio institucional; política de la UE; desarrollo de capacidades; zona de negociación.

Sumario. 1. Introduction. 2. Introducing a new theoretical concept in the institutional change debate: the trading zone. 3. Effectively facilitating institutional change for gender equality: what cases can teach us. 4. Discussion. 5. Conclusion. References.

Cómo citar: Linková, M.; Mergaert, L. (2021). Negotiating change for gender equality: identifying leverages, overcoming barriers, en *Revista de Investigaciones Feministas* 12(2), 297-308.

1. Introduction

Since 2010, starting with the call FP7-SCIENCE-IN-SOCIETY-2010-1, the European Commission has been funding so-called institutional change (also called structural change) projects to promote gender equality in research and higher education institutions under its funding programmes for research and development, most recently Framework Programme 7 and Horizon 2020. These projects bring together institutions from different countries which commit to analysing their situation as regards gender equality, to setting up and implementing a Gender Equality Plan (GEP), and to monitoring and evaluating the progress they make through their actions.

We, the authors of this article, have since 2014 been part of and contributed to several such projects (TRIG-GER, Equal-IST, EGERA, GEECCO, SUPERA, Gender-SMART, GEARING-Roles). We have acted as the monitoring and evaluation partners, advisory board members, and the partner responsible for providing support and capacity-building to the ones implementing GEPs as well as gender experts on the core implementing teams. Apart from these roles, we have also acted as policy advisors towards the European Commission. From these different perspectives as "privileged observers" of the change processes and positioning ourselves as "feminist critical friends" (Chappell and Mackay, 2020) towards the partners implementing their GEPs, we focus our analysis on the negotiations that efforts towards institutional change for gender equality entail and seek in this article to extract key learning points, supported by cases. More specifically, the methods we draw on are primarily participant observation (including frequent interactions with the core implementing team members) and textual analysis of various project documents. Our aim with this article is to demonstrate typical challenges in the change process, suggest pathways towards solutions for problems and challenges, and identify specific skills required in the negotiations which underscore the capacity-building needs of change agents.

Drawing on Feminist Institutionalism (FI) and Science and Technology Studies (STS), we introduce with this article the concept of the "trading zone" into the institutional change debate as a theoretical framework for our analysis. We posit that this concept offers an innovative and fruitful perspective on the negotiation processes and the interactions between various actors who hold differentiated power positions in the organisations. The insights gained through the analysis of specific cases afford a deeper understanding of the issues at stake as well as the barriers and obstacles that change agents typically face, while also allowing us to identify the key competencies required for effectively facilitating change efforts. As empirical material, we focus on a selection of cases that occurred in specific institutions in the projects in which we have been involved. We have applied purposive theory-based sampling, with the goal of selecting information-rich cases illustrating the different transactions in the trading zones, based on our prior knowledge of the circumstances. The cases have been chosen for their learning value and because they feature typical characteristics of institutional change endeavours (such as power imbalances, lack or loss of leadership support, the non-linearity of progress, competing organisational agendas and priorities, disciplinary differences and hierarchies). For obvious reasons of confidentiality of the actors involved, we have anonymised the case descriptions and neither do we identify the projects they stem from.

In terms of structure, following this introduction, we first present our theoretical frameworks of Feminist Institutionalism and the trading zone (section 2). Section 3 is the empirical part, in which the eight cases are described and analysed from the perspective of the trading zones. From each case, we identify the required competencies needed by the team of change agents to effectively handle the situation in order to further the advancement toward gender equality. In section 4, we discuss our analysis and findings. We end with a concluding section, summarising the main points of our contribution.

2. Introducing a new theoretical concept in the institutional change debate: the trading zone

Gender mainstreaming was adopted in the European Union, including the Commission, in the 1990s as the overarching policy approach to advancing gender equality (Pollack & Hafner-Burton, 2000, 435). Today, in-

stitutional (or structural) change is the dominant approach to advancing gender in research and innovation, promoted by the European Commission and an increasing number of EU countries (Linková and Mergaert, 2021). With the three objectives of the European Research Area (gender balance in decision-making, gender balance in research teams and the gender dimension in research), the goal is to achieve a change at the systemic level of the functioning of organisations – at the cultural, institutional, operational and individual levels. Gender Equality Plans (GEPs) are the instrument that is currently widely recognised and promoted to achieve the institutional changes at the EU level (European Commission, 2020); GEPs have also become a new eligibility criterion for applicants to Horizon Europe in force as of 2022.

With this systemic approach promoting institutional changes through GEPs, we can see a commitment from the Commission, EU governments as well as research funding and performing organisations to the gender mainstreaming efforts. This is a commitment to the transformational, agenda-setting approach which can respond to the limitations of gender mainstreaming[5] identified before (Lombardo, 2005; Walby, 2005; Lombardo, Meier and Verloo, 2009). Over the years, and this paper attests to this recognition too, the understanding of the change processes has grown, acknowledging the never finished nature of the gender mainstreaming effort and the need for the actors to be equipped for the change process both in terms of gender expertise and institutional change capacity.

To analyse the institutional change, we combine in this paper two approaches: Feminist Institutionalism and Science and Technology Studies, specifically the concept of the trading zone. This combination provides a powerful analytical tool in that Feminist Institutionalism departs from its crucial engagement with issues of power, which has been less present especially in the early conceptualisations of the trading zone. The concept of the trading zone puts at the centre of attention the material as well as discursive negotiations at play.

Feminist Institutionalism conceptualises institutions as fairly enduring, formal and informal gendered structures that reproduce and can counteract gender inequality (Mackay, Kenny and Chappell, 2010; Kenny, 2014; Weiner and MacRae, 2014). Institutions are gendered both nominally in terms of women's representation, particularly in leadership positions, and substantively in terms of values and norms. Gender equality efforts are a form of institutional change, and as such are likely to elicit different forms of resistance (Mergaert and Lombardo, 2014). Institutionalist approaches to institutional change have formerly focused more on exogenous influences and have been better in understanding continuity and stability, while more recently, historical institutionalism started paying more attention to endogenous effects and the inner life of institutions with power and contestation at the centre of institutional analysis (Waylen, 2014).

While the masculine gendering has been recognised as an enduring feature of institutional gender regimes with attendant power asymmetries, recent scholarship has emphasised the incremental and subtle ways in which organisations can change due both to external and internal influences, putting forward "a bounded model of institutional change" (Mackay et al, 2010, 578) or "bounded innovation" (Kenny, 2014) through the incremental processes of displacement, layering, drift and conversion (Mahoney and Thelen, 2010). Particularly relevant for our purposes here are layering (whereby new rules are introduced alongside existing ones such as when new gender equality mandates do not have the power to overthrow existing gender regimes), conversion (where actors do not have the power to change the institution and work gradually within, strategically redeploying existing rules in new contexts) and displacement (the removal of existing rules and the introduction of new ones).

Another important development that Feminist Institutionalism brings is the attention to the more intangible aspects of organisational culture and values which can thwart gender equality actions. Minto and Mergaert (2018) focus particularly on the logic of appropriateness (Chappell, 2006) and layering to examine barriers to institutional change. As regards the logic of appropriateness, specifically for research and higher education, gender equality actions constitute a seeming compromise for and threat to the culture of meritocracy which is here the underlying logic of appropriateness. Meritocracy continues to be posited as the neutral organising principle in research although recent work demonstrates the ways meritocracy is gendered (van den Brink and Benschop, 2011; Linková, 2017).

This is further compounded by a related logic of science as a mission rather than vocation which builds on the masculine expectation of total dedication, long-hours culture and the philosophical underpinnings of rationality and impartiality. Promoting gender equality is thus often seen as an ideological threat to the alleged neutrality and autonomy of research organisations, which impedes the prospects of success for the institutional change initiatives. Additionally, and related to the objectivist value system of science, there is the demand for hard data, objective findings that withstand the test of reproducibility which is particularly in evidence in natural science quarters. This objectivist logic of appropriateness then poses additional obstacles to gender equality actions in research and higher education as the methods applied in institutional change initiatives often build on qualitative social science methods.

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[5]   Such limitations include notably the risk for the efforts towards gender equality to become technocratic and depoliticized through processes of cooptation and accommodation to the dominant framings; another limitation is often the lack of attention to the existing existence of intersecting inequalities.

As said above, layering is a process whereby new rules are introduced alongside existing ones and they co-exist without any of them having the power to override the other. An important insight from STS is that institutions, including research and higher education, are rarely organised along a single organisational logic (Law, 1994; Linková, 2014) and new organisational logics may be introduced in response to external pressures; institutions in fact must be able to layer these organisational logics. Change agents then find themselves in a position to mobilise gender equality values when windows of opportunity open, or to subvert and give new meanings to values that govern the institution. This is, for example, evidenced in the arguments for addressing the gender dimension of research and innovation where the failure to do so is rebranded as a threat to the excellence, reliability and robustness of research practices and findings.

To complement these considerations, STS help us in theorising institutional change as an ongoing material-discursive enactment which mobilises multiple actors, both human and non-human (such as the GEP) which can achieve partial stabilisations but also runs the risk of being constantly undermined when the conditions change. In this paper, we use the notion of the trading zone as the site of institutional negotiation of symbols, norms, practices and behaviours which are always embedded in power relations. The trading zone helps us understand how contestations, coordination and subversion are done by the multiple actors involved in the change process.

The concept of the trading zone was coined by Peter Galison as a place "where the local coordination between beliefs and action takes place" (Galison, 1999, 138). The trading zone stresses locality and temporality while communities that contribute to its enactments remain heterogeneous (1999, 142). Galison underlines that trading zones are specific in that "groups can agree on rules of exchange even if they ascribe utterly different significance to the objects being exchanged; they may even disagree on the meaning of the exchange process itself" (Galison, 1997, 783). Building on Galison, Collins *et al.* (2007) explored trading zones in terms of the power needed to advance a particular enactment, and underscored the need for understanding how interactional expertise can be built and sustained by different stakeholders. They define trading zones as places "in which communities with a deep problem of communication manage to communicate" (Collins *et al.*, 2007, 658), though often at the cost of compromise, frustration and denial. Issues of who gets access to such spaces of negotiation, whose values and aspirations are represented and for whom they open up or close down possibilities are thus essential. But as Rosbach (2012, 24) stresses, the development of a common understanding is a potential outcome of negotiations in the trading zone. It should be noted that when there is no problem communicating, there is simply a trade, not a trading zone. This expanded understanding is useful for us because it opens space to consider (in–)equality, power and marginalisation among traded objects.

The concept of the trading zone has been used to analyse different sorts of negotiations that occur on various types of boundaries, including disciplinary or across academe and society. Various authors have developed classifications of trading zones. For heuristic purposes, we use the categorisation proposed by Collins *et al.* (2007) which is organised around two axes: one is an axis from cooperation to coercion which indicates the willingness of the parties to trade voluntarily. The second axis is that from homogeneity to heterogeneity where homogeneity indicates the gradual achieving of commonality, and heterogeneity the continued existence of opposition and competing logics, meanings and values. Figure 1 presents this categorisation with the four resulting quadrants[6]

General model of trading zones Homogenous		End state	
		Homogenous	**Heterogeneous**
Entry state	**Collaboration**	Quadrant – Inter-language	Quadrant – Fractionated *Boundary object* & *Interactional expertise*
	Coercion	Quadrant – Subversive	Quadrant – Enforced

Figure 1. Model of trading zones by Collins et al (2007).

The institutional change process can span the entire range of its enactments from regular trade in some instances where there is no need for negotiation, at least for some time, when the change is on track. More

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6   Collins *et al.* (2007, 663) chart a possible trajectory starting in the bottom-right quadrant where the actors are heterogeneous and either through exogenous or endogenous (softer or stronger) push are forced to cooperate; the actors then engage in negotiations which can result in increasing cooperation while the heterogeneity of actors persists (in FI this would link to conversion and layering); a further development still can result in an increasing development not only of the collaborative aspects but also of the understandings and a common language may be developed. Furthermore, the newly emerging institutional culture and practices may be so strong that they will start forming a new hegemony which will trigger further developments (in FI this would equal displacement). The final stage can be a point of return to the right-hand bottom quadrant when the newly formed institutional culture becomes dominant and has the power to enforce itself. However, if collaboration does not increase and differences among the actors persists, the trading zone is at threat of complete disintegration.

often than not, however, the change process requires exchange in the trading zone. In some instances, the core implementing teams manage to achieve a stabilisation and gradually create a common understanding of values achieving "inter-language" between the various parties to the trade (e.g. core team and top management). In many more cases, the trading cannot reach stabilisation and the parties continue in their endeavours, none having the full power to enforce or persuade the other party of its understanding. In this "fractionated trading zone", the Gender Equality Plan becomes a "boundary object" into which different meanings are inscribed, which can be mobilised in different contexts to achieve trading, for which interactional expertise is required (and must be built) between the parties to the trade. In their theorisation of the boundary object, Star and Griesmer postulate that "[B]oundary objects are objects that are both plastic enough to adapt to local needs and constraints of the several parties employing them, yet robust enough to maintain a common identity across sites" (Star and Griesemer, 1989, 393). They also discuss how in conducting collective work, which institutional change inevitably is, people come together from different social worlds, with different expectations and understandings and whereby the joint endeavour, such as implementing a Gender Equality Plan, has different meanings to them. Each of the actors has partial "jurisdiction" and resources and the mismatches between these social worlds become the subject of negotiation (Star and Griesemer, 1989; Leigh Star, 2010).

Gorman's important contribution to the theorisation of the trading zone is the notion of "moral imagination", which he argues participants must exercise in order to achieve the superordinate goal, such as promoting gender equality. He defines moral imagination as the ability to see another's situation as if it were one's own. In short, "[M]oral imagination consists of seeing that one's own cultural truths are views, and that alternative views are worthy of attention." Translating Gorman's argument to institutional change processes, imagining the future of a more gender-balanced organisation then requires "explicit consideration of values – of what kind of world we ought to create" (Gorman, 2007, 94).

In this paper, we conceptualise institutional change processes precisely as such trading zones. They are complex, non-linear, recursive matters. They are multiple, partial achievements in given temporal-spatial conditions, subject to change depending on the conditions of the negotiation and power distribution. Using the concept of trading zones, we examine the partial stabilisations of discursive and material practices that make the institutional change. Indeed, as Collins and colleagues show, fractionated trading zones in particular "require considerable work on the part of at least some participants if their potential is to be realized" (Collins *et al.* 2007, 665). Ours have been *in vivo* trading zones where we have had partial access to observing the implementation "in the wild" (Gorman, 2010, 292).

In the next section we will explore several enactments of trading zones, to illustrate the types of negotiations that occur among different organisational actors and units (change agents; allies; administrators; researchers; leaders), and among different disciplines (gender scholars and social science expertise versus natural sciences). The trading inevitably entails concerns of power and we discuss instances where one of the parties to the trade (top management) uses its power to stall the process of trading, and the gender scholars and practitioners must mobilise allies, as well as others where the change agents devise means to subvert and reframe resistances.

3. Effectively facilitating institutional change for gender equality: what cases can teach us

To illustrate how the above presented theoretical framework of the trading zone can be applied as an analytical tool to help to understand blockages and challenges, but also to identify ways to overcome them, we will in this section briefly describe eight cases that we observed in GEP-implementing organisations. These cases illustrate situations experienced by the core teams of change agents within their institutional contexts. We present four types of issues related to the change process. Firstly, with Case 1 and Case 2, we address the problems of entering the trading zone and the types of mobilisation that the GEP implementing teams can organise, internally or externally, to overcome the obstacles.

Secondly, with Cases 3, 4, 5, and 6, we examine different types of negotiations that occur in the fractionated trading zone. Specifically, we look into composition of the implementation teams, building of strategic alliances, disciplinary negotiations and hierarchies, and the ability to use windows of opportunity and strategic framing. Thirdly, with Case 7, we chart the move from the subversive zone to a collaborative trading zone which, at least temporarily, is built around a participatively created and shared inter-language. Our last Case 8 is that of a heterogeneous trading zone where the change agents use strategic framing in anticipation of resistances within the institution and manage to take the change process from the subversive to the fractionated zone where the objectives of the endeavour can be further debated and commonality built. Cases 2, 3, and 7 are located in countries where a legal GEP requirement exists and cases 1, 4, 5, 6, and 8 in countries with no GEP requirement.

Figure 2 shows the location of the cases we present in the model of the trading zones.

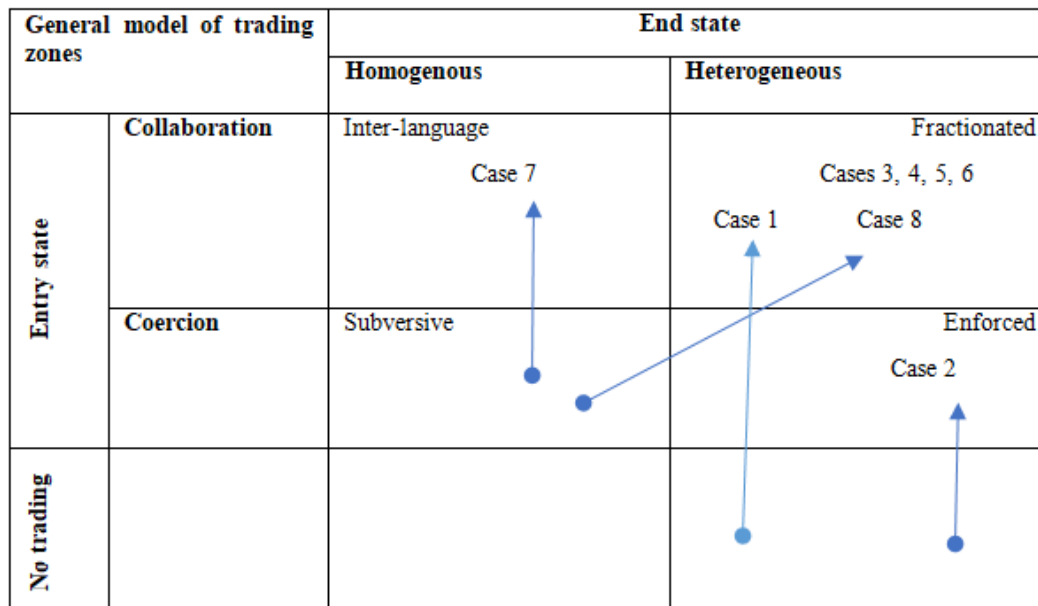| General model of trading zones		End state	
		Homogenous	**Heterogeneous**
Entry state	**Collaboration**	Inter-language Case 7	Fractionated Cases 3, 4, 5, 6 Case 1 Case 8
	Coercion	Subversive	Enforced Case 2
No trading			

Figure 2. Location of cases in the trading zones.

Case 1 showcases a strategic alliance developed by the core GEP team with a Centre for Technology Transfer of its university in order to create a point of access to the Rector. The leader of the GEP core team did not manage to enter into productive negotiations with the university's Rector. As observers, we interpreted the problem mainly as a matter of clashing personalities. The GEP team leader tried repeatedly to discuss with the Rector, to inform him, to request things, but was each time confronted with refusal or dismissal. At one point, a specific university centre was made responsible for working on the HRS4R (Human Resources Strategy for Research) to comply with EU expectations. Seizing this window of opportunity, the GEP core team found the people from this Centre to be responsive and open to gender equality concerns, in line with the HRS4R principles.

The staff at the Centre had direct access to and good contacts with the Rector and managed to get things done. Working through and with the Centre became the strategy followed by the GEP team in this university, linking the GEP to the HRS4R change processes, *de facto* de-blocking the situation in which they found themselves before. What we observed here was a complete blockage to engage in the "trading zone" first and then gaining access to the trading zone through the mobilisation of another actor who is accepted as "trading partner". Considering the power imbalance, the GEP team was not able to "coerce" a collaboration from the Rector, so no trading zone could be created. Later, they managed by bringing in another actor and ended up in the "fractionated" quadrant with a boundary object (the GEP) and the mobilisation of interactional expertise through the mediation of the Centre for Technology Transfer.

Case 2 presents a GEP team incapable of advancing the GEP work due to high-level resistance, until unblockage of the situation comes through a letter from the external evaluator in the project, which highlights the importance of external stakeholders in supporting the change process. The GEP team in this old university with conservative norms experienced rhetorical support but continuous resistance to advance the GE work through various forms of obstacles posed on its way by the Rector (creating delays, hindering access to key people and data, stalling meetings, etc.), despite the consistent efforts undertaken by the team. The team and the project, located in a Centre of the university and not in a central position, have the disadvantage of being deprived of authority and power.

The first external evaluation report produced by the monitoring and evaluation partner in the consortium was sent to the Rector with an accompanying letter by the evaluator stating (implicitly) that the university had to get its act together if it wanted to avoid troubles with the European Commission. This approach worked and unblocked the situation. Analysing the situation at hand, we observed lack of leadership support, lack of availability of resources (no power), and an organisational culture marked by a strong hierarchical divide and conservatism. Despite stakeholder involvement and participatory techniques, deployed by the GEP team, the gatekeeper did not allow real action for change. The lack of power and authority in the university hampered the capacity of the GEP team to advance. They had no power to coerce an entry into the trading zone, but the external party that entered and opened space exercised pressure by formulating an implicit threat. That approach proved effective and opened a position for the GEP team in a trading zone where the opponent found himself "encouraged" to collaborate in the "enforced" quadrant. This is a less than optimal position, not (immediately) conducive to real transformative change, but better than being placed outside the trading zone altogether. At least, this position allows a seat at the

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table and may lead to more fruitful negotiations when interactional expertise can be mobilised at a later stage, for example by enlisting other allies.

The next four cases address different types of negotiations that are necessary if the change process is to stay on track and have a chance of succeeding. They are related to different types of hierarchies that can be encountered and to the position and composition of the GEP implementing team, to disciplinary differences and institutional hierarchies, and organisational positioning of the GEP team *vis-à-vis* other institutional processes underway. Borrowing from Lombardo *et al*. (2009) who apply the concept of discursive stretching and bending to gender equality policy making, all these cases speak to the need to build interactional expertise of the actors involved and the ability to stretch and bend meanings of the boundary objects created.

In Case 3, the GEP team managed to get the university's approval to set up pilot groups to work on gender in research and gender in teaching respectively, but only for ten people in total. The team reported that negotiations had been hard and that they faced a lot of resistance from the university to obtain that ten people could invest 45 working hours each in such a pilot group. However, when the call for volunteers to participate in the groups was launched, the interest was significantly higher than expected: 40 people wanted to join. The team was reluctant to turn people down and engaged in negotiations with the university again, but in vain: the university did not want to grant more budget.

In the end, the GEP team managed to get additional funds from the corporate social responsibility unit so that all 40 people could be accepted to participate in the pilot groups. What we observe here is a GEP team that is persistent and highly motivated and manages to find creative solutions, knowing that they have managed to acquire backing and support in the university in different sites and at different levels thanks to their broad mobilisation and inclusive approach to designing their GEP – despite them having a hard time negotiating with the top management. They find themselves in the fractionated trading zone with the GEP as a boundary object and the necessity to engage all their interactional expertise to obtain what they want.

Case 4 is that of a GEP implementing team consisting of the internal staff and external gender equality experts who assisted the institutional team with the GEP design and implementation. This arrangement posed particular obstacles to implementation. Firstly, the internal team continued to rely exclusively on the external gender expertise and did not build its internal gender capacities. This occurred despite attempts from the external experts to form a reading group, providing literature and other resources. Also, in this instance, there was no umbrella capacity-building activity at the project level. This resulted in gender equality being conceived primarily as an issue of work-life balance and "fixing women" to be able to measure up with the masculine values of the organisation.

Secondly, the external experts had no previous knowledge of the institution, did not know the important people and potential allies and transformational agents, their only access to the institution was through the core team leader whose position also changed over time. Lastly, there was a limited history of, expertise in and willingness to employ participatory techniques, which hindered the negotiation of actions to be taken. This trading zone of the external and internal core GEP team members points to the strong need for increased negotiations in order to be able to create a boundary object (in this case, "balance" as the preferred denotation of the gender equality objectives) and the interactional expertise on the boundary between the internal and external team. We argue that this arrangement, while tempting when gender expertise is not internally available, poses specific threats to the change process, and underscores the vital importance of capacity-building both in terms of gender expertise and organisational change.

Case 5 is related to the trading between scientific disciplines. The hierarchical organisation of scientific disciplines persists, and in a change process social scientists and gender experts often come to interact with researchers in natural sciences and engineering. In this case, the core team developed the audit methodology which entailed a survey, focus groups and interviews, and presented it to and discussed it with the larger implementing team. The gender experts then wrote up audit reports to present the findings. The presentation of results ran into difficulties when one of the top managers at the university by whom the reports had to pass before being submitted to the top management and the academic senate objected to the findings as unscientific and subjective.

The results were rejected and could not be included in the report to the top management. This case underscores the lack of recognition, with gender expertise being labelled as "ideology", and social science and in particular qualitative research methods as unreliable and unscientific, with positivist and objectivist requirements being placed on the audit team. In this instance, the social scientists and gender experts on the team had to invest huge efforts in the gradual negotiation of the reliability of social science methodology and had to develop interactional expertise, enlisting "allies" in quantum chemistry and physics. Notably referring to the observer effect proved effective in exchanges with academics in quantum chemistry and physics who are familiar with the notion that observation changes the studied phenomena. This helped to counter the argument that just by asking certain questions in the audit and observing the functioning of the institution, the social scientists are changing the environment and hence cannot study the institution as it actually is.

Case 6 relates to how the GEP core team can make use of windows of opportunity and strategic framing. It highlights the need to link the institutional change for gender equality to existing or emerging interests and

needs of the university. In this instance, the GEP implementing university found itself at an important point in time when it was necessary to prepare new strategic documents in response to the Ministry's requests. The core team leader understood that it would be easier to "latch on" to ongoing processes at the university when documents "opened up" for renegotiation and revision. The leader established connections with the person responsible for drafting the new documents at the rectorate and in cooperation with the external gender experts found ways to insert references to gender equality, gender balance, and work life balance in the documents. This case stresses the importance of being well connected, with access to people responsible for strategy implementation, being able to spot windows of opportunity, having knowledge of the institution, of who matters and who the leadership listens to and where decisions are made. Here the newly prepared documents became the boundary object for the negotiation, where the GEP implementing team attempted to stretch the meanings (e.g. in ethics-related documents to incorporate sexual harassment provisions) and set new agendas (e.g. more balanced representation in leadership positions).

Case 7 is illustrative of successful negotiation in the trading zone and how the GEP implementing team can create conditions for building a homogenous trading zone around a common objective. It sketches the situation of a research institution at two different points in time. At the project's kick-off meeting, the two female project leaders convinced their male boss to accept chairing a consortium-spanning committee of institutional leaders. The argument they used was that it would look good on his CV that he works for gender equality, and that if he wants to be considered for promotion, this position of chair will compensate for not being a woman and will be an asset, as it is likely that next promotions will go to women. The man duly performs his role, is committed and engaged, and also manifests himself as gender equality promoter within his own institution.

One and a half year later, the manager fully supports the team's endeavour to ensure, through the deployment of participatory and co-creation techniques, that the to-be-designed new tele– and home-working policy of the organisation is fully gender-sensitive and takes into consideration the needs and situations of all staff. The institutional change in evidence here is one of displacement whereby old rules are replaced with new ones. This case shows how the location in a trading zone is not static, but rather situation– and time-dependent. The approach adopted by the change agents at the start of the project can be seen as a micro example of strategic framing, whereby they coaxed their manager into the project and its aims by linking their own objectives to his ambitions; a subversive move that brought him on board. This case is located in the subversion quadrant at the entry point. The later work on the development of a gender-sensitive tele– and homeworking policy happened in a collaborative and homogeneous spirit and in a shared pursuit of a common aim, situating the case in the inter-language quadrant. In terms of capacity-building, the team's proficiency in stakeholder mobilisation and participatory approaches have proven paramount.

The last case 8 is located in the quadrant of subversive trading and speaks to how the GEP implementing team gradually expanded the meaning of what was initially not a very ambitious gender equality action. The example arguably has salience for many institutions that are new to gender equality actions, especially in the Central and Eastern European region where gender equality is limited to work-life balance issues and where gender equality and feminism have negative connotations. At the outset of the change process, it was clear to the external gender equality experts that they would need to find a way to enter into a discussion about gender equality issues.

To this end, they referred to fairness in professional development irrespective of one's sex and combination of motherhood and work, which were used as an inroad to discuss other gender equality issues. In the focus groups and individual interviews, it was often possible to ask questions in such a way that the research participants recognised that work-life balance was not the only concern; that there were *a priori* biases against women in leadership positions, for example. For the junior and middle career women academics this resulted in discussing the extra demands on performance to reach the same positions. Thus, motherhood and the difficulty of combining it with a research career were used as a seemingly innocent and widely recognised topic, to initiate discussions about other gender related concerns that would have been more difficult to address at the start. This strategic framing of the project and its objectives helped the GEP implementing team to move from quadrant one where work-life balance and institutional inbreeding were used subversively, to gradually developing interactional understandings of gender equality in the fractionated trading zone.

4. Discussion

In this section, we highlight some key features of the change process as well as the types of skills and capacities that are required to ensure that gender equality can continue to be traded by all the actors involved. We do this with reference to the above-presented cases.

Firstly, as shown by all the cases, the change process is of an inherently processual nature and in most cases entails layering whereby new gender equality actions are added to previously existing organisational logics. Only in rare cases can a broad consensus be built around shared values and an institutional culture take shape, where an inter-language can be developed common to the actors involved and where, through processes of

displacement, new institutional logics replace existing ones (as in case 7). However, such a situation is never absolute, depending on various variables, like the objects at stake, the trading partners and their (possibly diverging) priorities and needs. Therefore, the actors in the trading zones are not statically positioned, as we see in several of the cases. Cases 1 and 2 illustrate how GEP-implementing teams that find themselves excluded from the trading can manage to mobilise internal (case 1) and external (case 2) actors in order to enter the negotiations. Importantly, progress is not linear; the GEP implementing teams can also encounter slippage, and in rare cases (not addressed in this paper) a complete collapse of the trading zone may occur.

Furthermore, the processual and very political nature of the change endeavours put the spotlight on the constant need of negotiation (especially in the fractionated trading zone, but not only there as threats to the process can arise with each new change in leadership or due to other challenges). This takes us back to Mackay's concept of bounded innovation which stresses incremental change when organisational innovation is restrained by the need for constant negotiation in the power-laden arena, with competing logics and agendas of multiple stakeholders. Thus, in line with the recent Feminist Institutionalist approaches, we want to emphasise the importance of the small wins that keep the change process on track.

This brings us to the issue of power, a core contribution of feminist analyses to institutionalism, which is paramount in the functioning of organisations and is always embedded in the trading. Therefore, it is necessary to attend to the positioning of the GEP-implementing teams in the organisation. As can often be seen, the responsibility for the GEP design and implementation is typically not located centrally and at the institution's highest level. However, the position of the team significantly impacts on its ability to access people in power and to build allies across the institution who can be mobilised if support wanes (case 1). The power dynamics at play also call attention to continued disciplinary hierarchies and the subordinate position of social sciences more broadly and gender scholarship specifically (case 5).

The issue of power and the question of who occupies the positions of power, where decisions on (non–) access to the trading zone are taken, are clearly related to the EU's objective to promote gender balance in the decision-making positions. Although nominal equality does not automatically mean substantive equality, it is clear that there is a link (and this is perhaps most easily visible in the attention to the integration of the gender dimension in research where the correlation between the share of women on teams and addressing gender equality has been proven (Nielsen *et al.*, 2017)). Nevertheless, the objective of women's representation in decision-making tends to be under-addressed in the structural change projects, not in the least because it is difficult to achieve impact in the course of a project with limited duration. Another factor to consider is the composition of the GEP implementing team. With case 4, we caution about a combined internal/external team, and argue that this arrangement (while tempting when gender expertise is not internally available) poses specific threats to the change process. This is particularly relevant as the GEP will become an eligibility criterion for Horizon Europe applicants, and this sort of solution may be sought in the institutions with no history of gender equality action.

Lastly, it is of crucial importance that in order for the trading to occur, the GEP change agents must develop competencies and capabilities related both to gender expertise and the steering of the change process, including negotiation skills and strategic framing, mobilisation of stakeholders, and participatory and co-creation techniques. When applied, these capacities, addressed to greater or lesser extent in all the cases, empower on the one hand and on the other increase the ownership over the change process by all stakeholders, which further opens up space in the trading zone.

5. Conclusion

The institutional change is premised on a commitment to transformational, agenda-setting change towards gender equality. It presumes top management support, dedication of both financial and human resources, attention to symbolic, institutional, interpersonal and personal levels at which such change should occur, with lasting effects to be created within the span of a four-year project (the typical duration of an EU-funded structural change project). The question begs asking whether such expectations are warranted. We argue that the EU-funding in structural change projects allows at least to kick-start the change, but that pursuing gender equality will always remain an unfinished business, as societies keep evolving. We have argued in the paper for conceptualising the change process as incremental, bounded innovation with temporary stabilisations of understanding but always at risk of new needs of negotiation arising. The cases we presented embody ongoing negotiations that can be and have been understood by the change agents as manifestations of resistance.

It has been argued that resistance is an intrinsic part of gender equality change processes because it goes to the core of the organisational culture, norms and practices (Lombardo and Mergaert, 2013; Bleijenbergh, 2018). Resistance has been posited as the source of ineffective implementation of gender mainstreaming (Benschop and Verloo, 2006), and so it is important to understand its dynamics in order to better diagnose the reasons why implementation may fail (Mergaert and Lombardo, 2014). Indeed, we see the lack of profound will to pursue change and to engage productively in the trading zone as quintessential resistance.

The issues of power and the ability to resist change bring us to Gorman's moral imagination, requiring the actors in the trading zone to see one's cultural truths as values and considering others' views as worthy of attention. This places specific demands on people in positions of power on whose support the change process relies but who, as representatives of the status quo and the institution, are often opposed to changes, especially if they see institutional change as restricting their autonomy, which can be compounded by their belief that equality has been achieved (Brannon *et al.*, 2018). Their unwillingness to train their moral imagination in situations of explicit power imbalance can therefore be seen as a form of resistance.

We also want to argue that, symmetrically, it is important for the GEP change agents to develop their moral imagination, to be willing to engage with the concerns of top management as well as other staff members with whom they engage. Ford *et al.*(2008) discuss different ways in which change agents can be seen as contributing to resistance to organisational change, and these address breach of trust, failures in communication, intentional misrepresentation and others. An important topic for further studies is to understand how people in positions of power can be enlisted to develop the moral imagination which would allow them to consider the realities of their institutions from the perspective of disadvantaged staff members and conversely, how change agents can navigate the complexities of the change process which–as we have also shown– include subversion, mobilisation and pressure in ways that do not threaten the process.

Importantly, recent studies posit resistance as productive, a resource for the organisational change because it shows a higher psychological involvement than acceptance of change, and hence the engagement of the various actors can promise a gradual evolution (Ford *et al.* 2008). To take these considerations further, we have employed the concept of the trading zone, to emphasise the constancy of negotiations, the partiality and temporality of achievements, and continuous evolution of capacities of the actors engaged in the trading zone to be able to carry out the organisational change. The concept of the trading zone, with its axes of coercion to collaboration and of heterogeneity to homogeneity, brings to the fore the embedment of the actors involved in unequal power relations. If resistance is conceived of as something not to be merely overcome, but as something integral to the change endeavour, this can allow the actors involved to transform it into a matter of ongoing engagement, which can ease the emotional burdens that resistance elicits. The negotiations can then contribute to a learning process whereby the actors involved may come to regard the trading and negotiations as a value in the organisational growth.

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