

THINKING ABOUT POLITICS

WELCOME MANUAL FOR WOMEN ELECTED OFFICIALS



VIRGINIA WOOLF

BASQUESKOLA

EUDEL

EUSKADIKO UDALEN ELKARTEA
ASOCIACIÓN DE MUNICIPIOS VASCOS



EMAKUNDE

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ESTADO INDEPENDIENTE GOBIERNO VASCO

● "Suffrage campaign days in
New Jersey"
(between 1914 and 1920)

*A woman must have money
and a room of her own if
she is to write fiction.*

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BASQUESKOLA
♀

“Governor Edwin P. Morrow signing the Anthony Amendment--Ky. was the twenty-fourth state to ratify”
January 6, 1920



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“Help us to win
the vote”
1914



PRESENTATION

The document you are holding seeks to help you during your time as a politician in your municipality. Its function is similar to a lighthouse, whose light is used to guide the people tasked with bringing a boat safely to port by warning them that they are close to the coast and helping them to know their exact position. Women elected officials who are more acquainted with the running of municipal life will not resort to it while they are in familiar situations and places, and they will use it as a guide when they are in less frequented spots and occasions. Those who are taking up the post for the first time will have a tool that will help them to carry out their role as local elected officials.

This manual therefore seeks to provide you with support in this stage on which you are embarking in the decision-making and public arena, a space fundamentally designed by and for men, and to which women have joined much later. In that context, this manual seeks to offer certain pointers to help you to embrace and understand political activity as something that, despite generating added difficulties for women, offers unique opportunities to improve their living conditions, to transform those structures and models that relegate them to the background and, consequently, to create a fairer and more equal social model.

We want this “lighthouse” to shed light on some aspects to be considered that, far from providing misleading shortcuts, seek to recall that this journey that you are embarking on must be in keeping with the municipality model that you wish to foster, with the society model in which you want the population you are working for to reside, with that model that would make your municipality a better place.

“A woman must have money and a room of her own if she is to write fiction”

VIRGINIA WOOLF

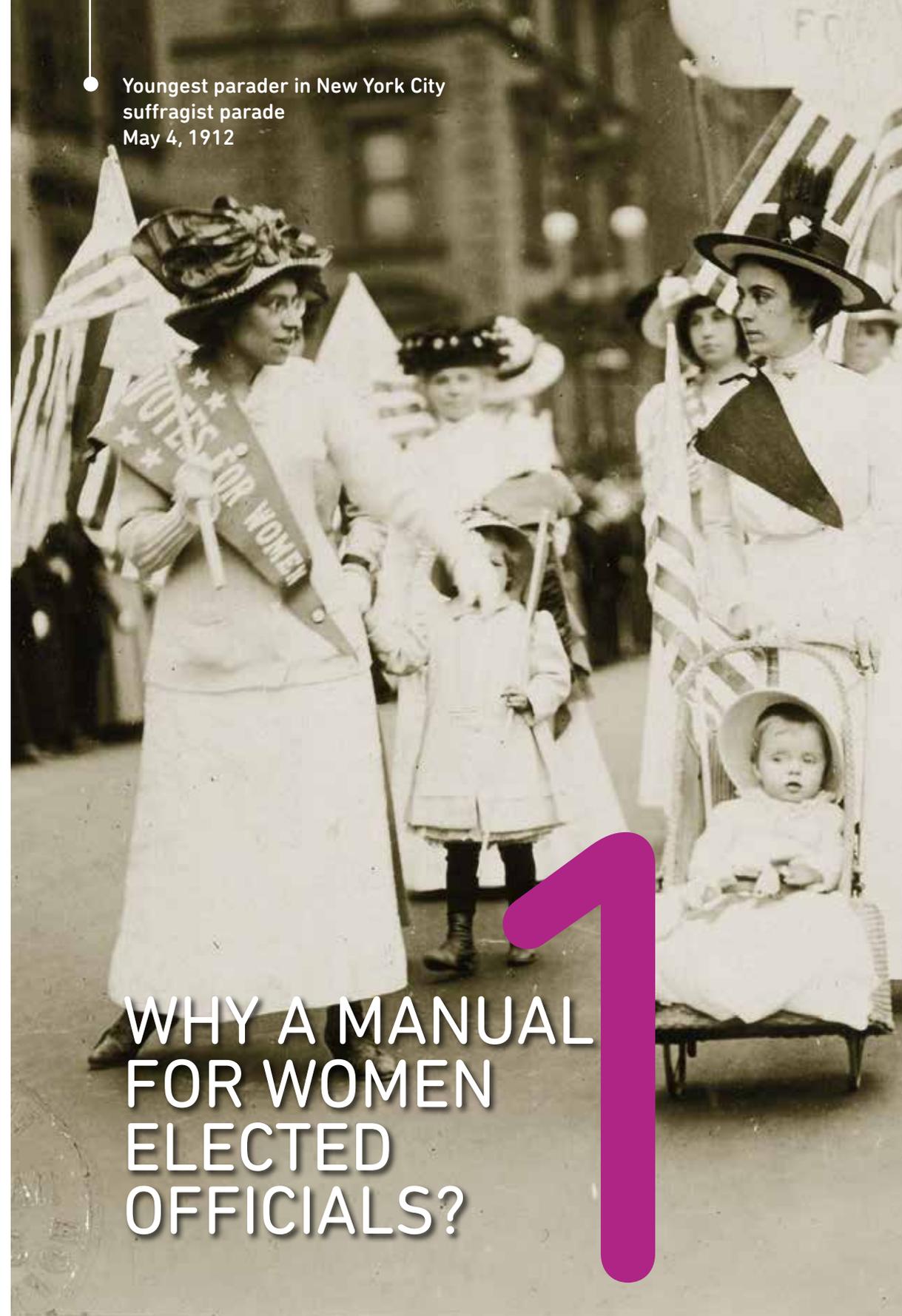
Yet, above all, this manual seeks to remind that you are not alone on this journey, that there are many women colleagues who you are going to come across in different areas and at different times, and that the opportunities to achieve the set objectives multiply thanks to awareness, bravery and shared commitment.

Therefore, the first pages of this document address the reasons for us offering this tool. This is followed by a short analysis of the presence of women in local governments after the May 2015 elections. Some of the obstacles are then described that women face when accessing municipal politics from a gender analysis and which explain, in many cases, the previous snapshot. The following section seeks to explain the importance of the challenge and the need to consider other ways of engaging in politics and of policy-making. The document includes a final section with several strategies to make this new transforming policy possible where women elected officials are in centre stage and addresses the need to do so from the room of one's own that Virginia Woolf refers to in her book¹.

Virginia Woolf Basqueskola purports to offer you that room as a place for meeting, learning and support on that path you are about to travel.

¹ Woolf, Virginia. "A Room of One's Own" 1929

Youngest parader in New York City
suffragist parade
May 4, 1912



WHY A MANUAL
FOR WOMEN
ELECTED
OFFICIALS?

“To finally recognise our own invisibility is to finally be on the path towards visibility”

MITSUYE YAMADA

We come across multiple and different arguments when we try to delve further in the whys and wherefores of the smaller number of women in the public arena and, more specifically, in the decision-making spheres. We often resort to those reasons that focus on the women themselves, by laying the blame on them and individualising responsibilities. However, to perform a more adequate analyse, we need to delve further into those explanations that go beyond the individual cases and provide us with a broader and more comprehensive view of the reality, stressing the structural aspects that hinder equal participation in politics in general and specifically in municipal politics.

This document seeks to highlight some of those aspects to be considered, that help to understand why, when the reality shows such significant differences between men and women, there are grounds for thinking that there are other type of

factors that have a deeper influence, beyond the personal decision that each person may be able to take; structural factors that are often cancelled out and become invisible, and which involve emphasising how the prevailing social model is based on inequalities, with the most deep-rooted and, therefore, the most “naturalized” being those down to gender. This involves analysing the participation of women in local politics from a gender perspective, shifting the focus from the individual to the collective, from the specific to the structural.

It is therefore essential to be perceived and understood from questioning what is socially accepted as “natural” and as “normal”, to be able to identify those gender structures and mandates that condition many of the decisions that both women and men believe they take freely. It is from preparing a comprehensive diagnosis that it is possible to design structures that reinforce decision-making and allow

“To wall in your own suffering is to risk it devouring you from inside”

FRIDA KAHLO

an emancipating and transforming political participation to be built up.

Furthermore, should that not be done, failure to identify the gender structures and mandates will result in the difficulties and failures being interpreted as something individual, the consequences of personal constraints and limitations. This means that women sometimes experience solitude and frustration

in political activity, resulting in their failing to mainstream their own experiences and, therefore, there is no learning from experience. Precisely, learning and sharing from experience is a way to open up the way for other elected officials to benefit from it and to thus be able to progress collectively towards another way of policy-making and to more equal societies.

“We will only succeed if we do not forget to learn”

ROSA LUXEMBURG

Two suffragettes casting votes in New York City. 1917

THE PRESENCE OF WOMEN IN LOCAL GOVERNMENTS OF THE BAC



Knowing the environment where elected officials are going to govern is fundamental to be able to take the appropriate decisions and respond to the needs that emerge in their work as politicians. The work to be carried out by a woman elected official is defined, to a great extent, by the point in history and the place when it takes place. Therefore, identifying the specific features of each case becomes something essential. It is obvious that it is not the same to be a member of a local council in a small municipality as in a large city, of a council structured into robust areas with specific technical staff or of a council that groups different policies into a single area and which is understaffed, of a council with solvent and consolidated budgets or one with significant debts. All these aspects will determine their political activity to a great extent.

However, if we are talking about knowing the setting, the leadership position needs to be analysed, along with the population and context

at which the policies are aimed. A global vision is needed of the positions and conditions that men and women have in the political impact and decision-making arenas, as, as has already been pointed out, there are structural factors that are beyond their sphere of influence, but they will also need to be decision-makers in order to hold office appropriately.

As has been discussed above, women becoming involved in institutional political activity was a long time coming and, despite the progress made, there are still important challenges facing them.

In the case of the Basque Parliament, there was no balanced representation of men and women until 2005, which was precisely the year when *the Gender Equality Act 4/2005, of 18 February*² was passed, which was decisive for achieving that balanced presence. The participation of men and women has remained balanced since that legislation was passed. It

² Its Fourth Final Provisions amends the Elections to the Basque Parliament Act 5/1990, of 15 June, by adding this paragraph to its Article 50: "The nominations put forward by the political parties, federations, coalitions or groups of constituents will consist of at least 50% of women. That proportion will be maintained in the list of candidates as a whole and in each six-name section. The competent electoral boards of the Basque province will only accept those nominations that comply with what is indicated herein both for the candidates and for the substitutes".

therefore follows that even though the gap between the percentages of men and women in politics tended to close over the years, it was not until legislation was introduced in this regard that real parity was achieved. We can, therefore, conclude that the balanced presence of men and women as a first condition for real equality is the consequence of a conscious act, of a political decision that facilitated, through positive action, the path towards real equality.

As regards the municipalities of the BAC, it would be the Organic Law 3/2007 for effective gender equality³ which would affect

the Electoral Act and facilitate the balanced presence of men and women in municipal policy. Accordingly, if we look at the last elections, 41.5% were women out of the total number of elected officials for the 2015-2019 parliamentary terms, which is up 2.7 points on 2011.

However, the figures are not so positive if we focus on the mayors' offices. In this case, even though the percentage of female mayors rose by 3 points in the last local elections (6 points up on 2007), the difference with respect to men is much more significant than in the case of the councillors, with 63 female mayors

³ Article 44 bis amends the General Electoral System Organic Law, "The nominations put forward for the elections of members of the Spanish parliament, local elections and of members of island councils and of the Canary Island Councils pursuant to this legislation, members of the European Parliament and members of the Legislative Assemblies of the Autonomous Communities shall have a balanced composition of women and men, so that candidates of each of the sexes account for at least forty per cent in the list as a whole. When the number of posts to be covered is less than five, the proportion of women and men will be as near as possible to the numerical balance."

and 185 male ones⁴ in the current 2015-2019 parliamentary term, i.e., barely 25%.

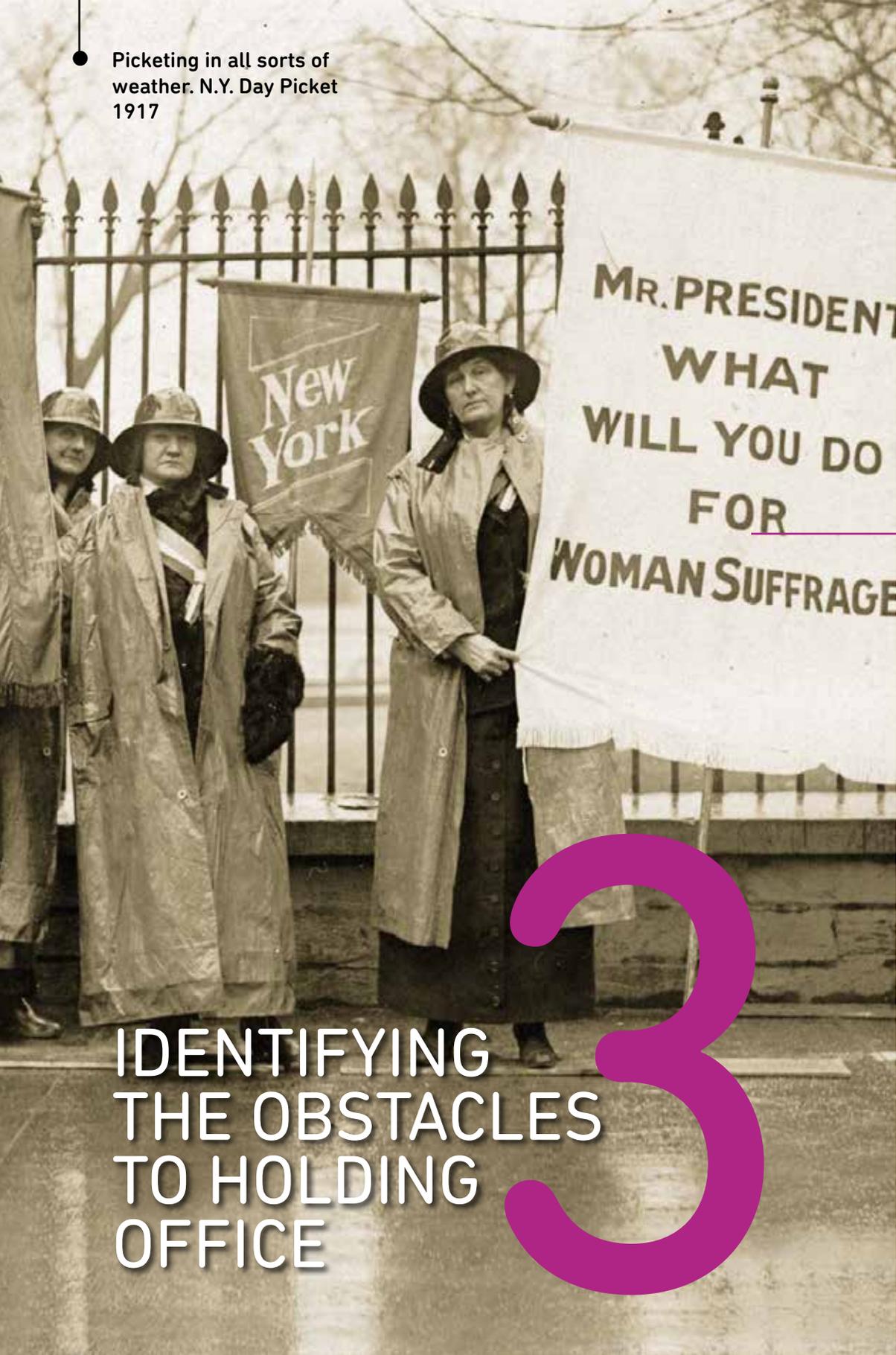
As regards the tenure in office of the women, in the current parliamentary term 32.8% of the female mayors (a total of 19) were returned, while that percentage stood at 52.3% (a total of 101) in the case of the male mayors.

We should end this section with a final note about the presence of female mayors according to the size of the municipalities. Particularly noteworthy is the absence of female mayors in all the provincial capitals of the BAC. However, their presence is proportional to their representation in the mayor's offices in small and medium-sized municipalities.

⁴ Balarriain had not been constituted as of the date of preparing this manual.

Beyond this general snapshot, it is important to consider municipal policy more closely and shift our attention to the type of council offices that women take up as, in the vast majority of occasions, they seem to be linked to the roles that are traditionally assigned to women (Social Welfare, Culture, Equality, etc, and not so many are put in charge of Town Planning, The Treasury, etc.), and which are often classified as being less important than the others. However, there are areas linked to enabling the collective wellbeing through services and resources that correct social inequalities when it comes to accessing some areas needed for a full life.

Picketing in all sorts of weather. N.Y. Day Picket 1917



IDENTIFYING THE OBSTACLES TO HOLDING OFFICE



“Those who do not move, do not notice their chains”

ROSA LUXEMBURG

THE ILLUSION OF EQUALITY

Denying inequalities, and naturalizing them until they become transparent, results in the widespread belief that gender equality is a reality. This implies assuming that everyone has the same options and possibilities of accessing resources and areas as they only depend on individual abilities and are not limited by a context that places them at a disadvantage. This illusion of equality acts as a perpetrator of inequalities, as denying that they exist closes the door to possible transformative measures.

On the other hand, being able to carry out an in-depth analysis of the patriarchal social model helps to understand and explain those situations that female elected

officials have to face and which arise from this structural inequality.

In turn, the fact that there are women mayors in some municipalities causes us to think that equal opportunities are a fact. We deduce that if they have managed to reach such office, any woman can do so in equal conditions with respect to their male colleagues. It is the “token women” concept that tends to extrapolate the profile of some women with their presence being normal and the real equality of all women. Furthermore, analysing in more detail the conditions under which that access occurred will provide information on possible gender constraints that they must have faced in order to assume office.

“The androcentric fallacy, present in all the mental constructs of patriarchal civilisation cannot be rectified simply by “adding” women”

GERDA LERNER

● ANDROCENTRISM: THE UNIVERSALITY OF MALE AND DISREGARD FOR FEMALE MODELS

Embarking on public activity in institutions often means getting involved in an area in which it seems, after they have been sworn in, that the rules of the game are already laid down, the ways of doing things seem to be set and the agenda prepared. The task would be, therefore, to learn the rules, take

up a place in the framework and manage the policy. However, there should be another way of going about things, asking who defined the rules of the game, which criteria were used to prepare the agenda and how the issues that must appear on it are defined.

“The world is the work of men; they describe it from their own point of view, which they confuse with absolute truth”

SIMONE DE BEAUVOIR

Apart from the historical absence of women in institutional policy, there is a hierarchy of male over female which is driven by two mechanisms which, in turn, again act as an obstacle to women’s participation in the public sphere: mainstreaming the male discourse, taking it to be valid for all people equally, and disregarding the female achievements and models.

Speaking about the universality of all that is masculine implies talking about the universality of a model that has become the dominant one

according to a very specific profile of “men”: white, heterosexual, adult and with a job, which means that there are many people along with women who do not fit into what is deemed to be universal.

Furthermore, even though it is true that women have actively participated in the decision-making and political arenas are the minority, it is also true that the contributions of the ones who have done so are less visible, particularly if they actually question the prevailing model.

“In a patriarchal society, objectivity is the name we give to male subjectivity”

ADRIENNE RICH

“For all the dinners are cooked; the plates and cups washed; the children sent to school and gone out into the world.. Nothing remains of it all. All has vanished. No biography or history has a word to say about it”

VIRGINIA WOOLF

Consequently, the political agenda has been marked by activities that the patriarchal system deems to be important. Those jobs, responsibilities and roles that have been traditionally allotted to women are relegated to the background, where they are undervalued and, often, become invisible.

By way of an example, care and household work, activities that are traditionally allocated to women, have been considered to be activities in the private sphere, which have to be overcome on an individual basis within the family. From a feminist perspective, it is essential that the pillars sustaining

life and the wellbeing of people are visible, by giving the tasks involved the value they deserve and including them in the political agenda to manage them in a fair and equitable way.

Therefore, women need to take part in preparing an agenda that facilitates the analysis of the political dimension of the private sphere (“the personal is political”), which questions the gender mandates and develops other ways of policy-making, other ways of looking at, assessing and managing the public from the ethics of care, and taking that as a universal benchmark and not just for women.

THE SOCIAL PUBLIC-PRIVATE DIVISIONS THAT PERMEATES THE POLITICAL CULTURE

A system based on the division of the private and public spheres is underpinned on the work that someone in the family performs, in charge of the care and everyday tasks to sustain life (reproductive work), so that someone else has time and freedom to be able to influence in the production and decision-making process (productive work). This sexual division of work has different consequences for women and for men.

It is true that women are increasingly more present in the decision-making and production areas, and that, even though to a much lower extent, men are also

playing a greater role in the private sphere. However, the real lack of co-responsibility means that the women are strongly conditioned by the effects of the decisions of one sphere on the other, and can see an important difference in how some or others experience the cop-outs.

Local politics is seen to be exclusive and full-time work, with no fixed work schedule, and incompatible with private life. This alleged incompatibility does not have the same consequences for female and male elected officials. In the case of the former, the decisions they make in private life tend to condition their political activity to a great extent, and, at the same time, the decisions

that they take with respect to political activity will also strongly impact their private life and how they assume their decisions.

By way of example, taking up office proves to be for some women politicians a project involving the family unit that requires care and household work to be reorganised, which leads to greater co-responsibility.

There are other issues that are also worthwhile pinpointing with respect to the symbiosis existing between both spheres in the case of women, and that is the expectations that are generated around their way of policy-making.

Despite women joining the public sphere and their social role beginning to emerge in a different way, the gender mandates and the division of roles between women and men tend to remain unchanged, with the women being expected to

continue with the same attitudes and skills that they show in their activity in the private sphere. The behaviour patterns are, therefore, expected to also be reproduced in those cases where the division between private and public spheres depending on the gender blur to some extent.

The smaller presence and, in some cases, the absence of women in the decision-making positions and of power is something that is repeated in the majority of areas: companies, public institutions, social organisations... the higher up we look, the fewer women we find. The figures in the above section confirm the difference between the percentage of female councillors and female mayors compared to those for men, which allows us to exemplify that the "glass ceiling" or "slippery surface" also exists in municipal politics.

“Women are prisoners of their fear of change, because to do so would mean no longer being women in the only way that they know how to be so. They also believe that it is impossible to change, that there is only one universal way of being women, that it has and will always be so”

MARCELA LAGARDE

Different feminist analysis⁵ of the political culture argue that the fact that the advocacy arenas have nearly exclusively been occupied by men, has given rise to male habits and ways of doing things, thus generating a series of symbologies, benchmark models, rituals, norms and beliefs that are in line with a certain androcentric culture. For example, the informal arenas sometimes play a key role in the day to day running of local political to facilitate rapprochements, establish relations of trust, etc..., areas where women often have a smaller presence for questions linked to care work. Therefore, the presence is established as a key aspect in political promotion.

Generating changes in women and men's participation in the public sphere requires strategies for a far-reaching cultural change to be addressed. Therefore, it needs to be understood that culture precedes people, thus contributing inherited components and keeping some of the values of the people who founded it. Yet it also needs to be understood that culture is continual changing, transforming through the contributions of people who form part of it. It is here, from this approach, from where people who form part of the public sphere by influencing its management, the undertaking to transforming that culture for the sake of equality must be acquired.

⁵ San José. Begoña: De la impotencia de Antígona al empoderamiento de las mujeres en el siglo XXI. 2004

In the days of "Old Dobbin" and Derby hats Mrs. Harriot Stanton Blatch exhorted the Wall Street crowds 1915-1920



THE IMPORTANCE OF THE CHALLENGE

“The economic growth that the masculinist model of progress has sold has been the growth of money and capital based on the other destruction of other kinds of wealth such as the wealth produced by nature and women”

VALDANA SHIVA

“What will I get out of going into politics? What do I want to offer? What impact can I have on the life of people who live in my municipality? What areas are I most interested in? What are my goals?”

I am sure that many of the female elected officials have asked themselves some of these questions and I am sure that, in some cases, answering them has taken much longer than they thought. As answering those questions requires in-depth reflections, of perceiving and understanding themselves in an area in whose design they have not participated, but which offers unique opportunities to improve the living conditions of the local residents where they are going to take up their office as elected officials.

This task can be performed individually and also collectively. In

the case in question, it is particularly interesting to find an answer in collective areas for women. Thus, the reflection will be able to identify shared experiences, which will be fundamental to delve further in those aspects that have led them to make the decision to run for public office in their municipality and which will become their driver during this stage.

In this section, we want to highlight aspects of some ways that women aware of their situation and position go about politics, and who are committed to a fairer society, not only to do justice to their important endeavours, but also to help other women to set off together towards a new horizon.

When women aspire to go into politics, the vast majority of them do so as they are driven by the intention of contributing to improving the quality of life in their municipalities and to

“The extraordinary achievements of women in every walk of life have silenced forever the loose talk of women’s inferiority. Those who still cling to this fetish do so because they hate nothing so much as to see their authority challenged. This is characteristic of all authority, whether the master over his economic slaves or man over women. However, everywhere women is escaping her cage, everywhere she is going ahead with free, large strides”

EMMA GOLDMAN

working to achieve a fairer society. However, as Clara Fassler⁶ points out, the mere presence of women in local politics does not automatically mean that the gender perspective is included in the institutional programmes and policies, that are implemented, or that far-reaching changes are made to the ways of policy-making. In this regard, we should not overlook that political institutions are structured and are

based on deep-rooted dynamics and ways of doing things that generate great resistance to any change and, even more so, if that implies questioning the gender mandates.

Neither can we forget the context in which women go into local politics. We are facing a crisis regarding the legitimacy of political institutions, along with a worsening of the crisis of the financial-economic system, where

⁶ Fassler, Clara: “Desarrollo y participación política de las mujeres. En publicación: Repensar la teoría del desarrollo en un contexto de globalización.” Tribute to Celso Furtado. Vidal, Gregorio; Guillén R., Arturo. (comp). Enero 2007

“We ignore our true stature until we stand up”

EMILY DICKINSON

the measures adopted in response are generating a lack of resources that conditions the policies of many local councils. In this context, I am sure that some women elected officials have experienced, or probably will experience, on some occasions, a feeling of frustration when they see their expectations limited or when they perceive that it is not up to them to carry out the changes that a priori

had been proposed. Yet it is also in this context where there are greater needs to intervene from the public sphere to improve the life of people, to provide solutions for the outcome of an unfair social organisation system. It is regarding the urgent need to put the life of people and their care in the spotlight that the contribution of women elected to public officer becomes particularly relevant.

● The first picket line.
1917



Taking part in local politics can provide an experience of empowerment⁷ through an ongoing collective learning process that will require a broader outlook and overcoming certain dynamics and values that, as part of this society, have gradually taken root without raising awareness of that. Women, in the same way as men, have been immersed in the patriarchal domination model and, therefore, they are not alien to reproducing its mandates. Consequently, one of the key aspects to be able to implement the changes that they as female politicians are introducing in society and in the institutions themselves, is raising awareness of the constraints and gender mandates that effect the everyday life of men and women and, in this specific case, of those women who

have opted to actively take part in local politics. Awareness raising that helps to progress from feelings needs linked to the fact of being a woman to being able to identify them and name them, and to design and develop measures to be able to come up with a response. This exercise allows meaning to be given to the experience of being women elected officials in local politics within a given context, understand what are its causes and establish new ways of being a politician that are more in keeping with a fairer and equal society.

Awareness-raising of the gender mandates and putting forward policies dealing with them involves incorporating the strategic interests of women in the political agenda. In other words, beyond responding

to the most immediate practical needs, common goals need to be established that arise from analysing the unequal gender relations and which are aimed at achieving a more equal organisation of society. Those strategic interests are used to lay the foundations to generate alliances with other female politicians and consolidate the grounds for a new way of policy-making.

The difference between the practical needs of women and their strategic interests are to do with the first improving their standards of living but do not change their position in society. One such example is the fact that female politicians consider within a common agenda the need to set up childcare services for those meetings at times where the work-life balance is more complicated. Even though this may make the conditions in which they work as a politician easier, it does not question the co-responsibility of care or whether the schedule for the political activity are appropriate

to ensure a work-life balance, both for female and male politicians.

Another example may be that female elected officials may challenge their demands through their colleagues with greater political weight. Even though that would make it easier to pass on their messages, it would not improve their position in the political scene so that their proposals are defended on an equal footing. This happens, according to Celia Amorós, because women in those spheres tend to be sitting on “the edge of the chair, not comfortably sprawling in an armchair. For better or worse. Or worse, because it is as if we were exercising power without being fully inaugurated: we need additional doses of male endorsement if we want to take a firm stand”.

Sharing with other women politicians the strategic interests that unite them means considering the need to transform gender inequality situations and setting off together towards a fair and

⁷ The Declaration of the IV Beijing World Conference refers to the empowerment of women as their full participation on the basis of equality in all spheres of society, including participation in the decision-making process and access to power, are fundamental for the achievement of equality, development and peace.

equal society. We do not intend to argue that all women should have the same vital experience, but rather that the fact of being women means they share vital moments, specific experiences, and needs and interests linked to gender roles that are assigned to them.

The fact of designing common agendas based on the strategic interests of women in general, and of elected officials in particular, facilitates the task of constructing alliances with other women, sharing experiences and assessing the potential of those alliances in the development of local policies. Thus, in addition to the satisfaction generated by working for their town and improving the quality of life of the local residents, there is also awareness that they are working to establish the bases of a society that exceeds the inequalities between men and women, at the same time that it facilitates not only the access of other women to local policies, but also in the holding of their office.

The presence of women aware of the gender inequalities at local level allows the false idea to be broken of the universality of life experiences of the human being. That is, the participation of women in the local representative bodies ensures that the way they engage in the world is to be present in the decision making. Thus, not only is the validity of the male universal model as a unit for measuring everything questioned, but also the traditional way of policy-making is also challenged.

By incorporating new ways of going about things, deep-rooted dynamics of the “traditional political game” based on the “win-lose” game and ways are opened up for policy-making based on alliances and consensus. Ways of policy-making that would be important were welcomed both by female and male elected officials.

Furthermore, the involvement of women in politics, the incorporation

“It is ridiculous to take on a man’s job in order to be able to say that a woman had done it – yah! The only decent reason for tackling a job is that it is your job, and you want to do it”

DOROTHY SAYERS

of their practical needs and strategic interests to the public agenda and negotiating and census as a generator of alliances are aspects that open up the way for other women, who did not take part in the public arena due to gender constraints, have benchmarks to follow and new agendas that help them to assign their own goals for their period of office.

Women elected officials have been able to hold office thanks to the struggle, work and commitment of many women who, during the different waves of feminism,

facilitated their access first to the right to vote and then to be elected. From when Mary Wollstonecraft (1759-1797) demanded the “rights of women” over the so-called “rights of men” to the suffragettes fighting for the right to vote, there is a whole list of women that made progress in the socio-political involvement of women. And therefore, to a certain degree, recognising this feminist genealogy also implies setting new achievements for the following generations in order to steadily progress with new steps on the path to equality.

Suffragists distributing hand bills advertising
March 3, 1913, suffrage parade

TOWARDS OTHER WAYS OF ENGAGING IN POLITICS AND OF POLICY- MAKING



“Existing as a women does not imply participation in male power, but calls into question the very concept of power”

CARLA LONZI

We cannot resort to essentialisms when talking about other ways of engaging in politics and of policy-making, ignoring the fact that the structures in which the different women elected officials operate and their own characteristics are so diverse that they experience things differently and that they sometimes cannot or do not want to come together. However, the fact of sharing situations, obstacles and, above all, an agenda, and bringing everything to the table, facilitates the identification of the mechanisms that operate by the fact of being women, and of the possible challenges that they share so that, from there, each one finds the best arena to address the different situations and hold office in the best way possible.

Once this has been clarified, it is also important to take into account that it is, often, the system itself which, as a strategy to avoid change, strives to underscore the differences

and hide what the women elected officials share due to the fact of being so. Therefore, a priori, it may not be simple to identify the strategic interests that the elected officials share as women, and which are those that could motivate them and encourage them to establish alliances between themselves. Yet it is precisely the collective construction of that common agenda which will allow progress to be made by adding elements to a new way of engaging in politics and of policy-making that also facilitates the holding of office.

Successfully identifying the strategic interests that women elected officials (basis for establishing a transformative political agenda) requires an empowerment process to be a process by means of which women increase their autonomy and the decision-making capacity that affects their lives and the living conditions of other women, and contribute, ultimately, to a

“I do not wish women to have power over men, but over themselves”

MARY WOLLSTONECRAFT

transformation and redistribution of power between women and men.

We are talking about empowerment as a process that involves awareness-raising first individually and then collectively, and which, ultimately, aspires to transform the model and power relations.

One of the key of individual gender awareness-raising is to understand what is happening and to place it in the specific context in which it happens, by analysing the different gender factors that include it. This contextualised understanding of the reality provides aspects for greater awareness of gender relations and how they impact the daily life of women. Individual empowerment broadens the view and allows the surrounding environment to be interpreted from another perspective, identifying the whys and wherefores of situations where women elected officials experience frustration, insecurity, lack of recognition, etc., arising from the ways of policy-

making that is alien to them and generates unrest in them to be able to transform them.

The individual empowerment process leads to policy making by identifying the unrest that those situations generate, by naming them, expressing them and understanding them as part of a system that relegates women to the background.

Yet this individual awareness-raising process must lead to a collective one in order to be able to achieve transformation. The collective in the empowerment processes therefore, acquires, a fundamental importance: sharing with other women, from symmetric and non-hierarchical relations, and being able to have a new approach that allows their experiences and feelings to be interpreted from another perspective, as an essential step within the very empowerment process. We are talking about women elected official being able to create a collective awareness of “us”, which requires a

joint reflection with other women, by defining the shared goals and targets. It, therefore, reaches a sometimes minimum and other times maximum consensus about the model of society that they wish to achieve together.

Talking about the collective level in the empowerment processes allows

their transformation capacity to be shown. We therefore believe that individual processes of change will not be sufficient if they do not go hand in hand with measures that foster the collective action of women in order to enable political and social changes.

“Everything is designed and structured from the male point of view. Sometimes, even though a woman is in charge, there has been no suggestion that she can go about in a different way”

GEMMA CERNUDA

Suffrage envoys from San Francisco greeted in New Jersey on their way to Washington to present a petition to Congress containing more than 500,000 signatures.

1915



A ROOM
OF ONE'S ONE

“Freedom is learned by practicing it”

CLARA CAMPOAMOR

The fact that women approach politics by setting their sights on an ideal model without first analysing the aspect that define and limit their advocacy capacity, apart from generating frustration, can blur their goals. If their sights are set on the ideal of transformative politics aimed at a fairer and more equal relational and social model, this becomes an unachievable utopia if the available tools are not well calibrated to carry on progressing in that direction. This guide seems to be a beacon to also spotlight those tools which women politicians can use to succeed.

Far from offering magical recipes, this section seeks to compile some strategies that, based on the experiences of other women, can serve to engage in politics. These strategies are put forward as tools to overcome the obstacles mentioned earlier in this document. The mere fact of having been able to identify those strategies based

on the experience of other women is irrefutable proof that change is underway, that there are experiences of engaging in politics and policy making in another way, and that embracing those new models pave the way for those transformative changes to take place. In that context, we therefore urge you to experiment with the strategies and to also understand how they are all in response to dynamic situations and realities, as far from being universal, they will have to be assessed, moulded, adapted and applied according to each context.

Furthermore, it should be noted that the strategies put forward not only may be useful to be involved in policy-making as elected officials, but also as a way of governing the way of engaging for women and the general public. The institutions ought to generate conditions so that the women residing in the municipality in which the office is held, can also

benefit from them, so that by means of policies seeking to empower women, they become, along with the elected officials, active agents for change.

We return in this section to the idea of Virginia Woolf regarding the need to have a room of one's own, on the grounds that it is from that being a woman in the male domain and of the decision-making sphere, from where strategies should be put forward that, apart from acting to carry out the

political activity, can be use to level the playing field for men and women in our municipalities.

But how?

Our proposal is structured according to the three levels of empowerment (individual, collective and for transformation) and a proposal of phases interlinked with them, which will allow conscious transformation processes to be set up that enable action based on collective and individual processes.

The proposed phases are as follows:

Feeling -> Knowing -> Empowering -> Wanting -> Doing

“It seems to me, that those who dare to rebel in every age are those who make life possible - it is rebels who extend the boundary of right, little by little..., who narrow the confines of evil and reduce them to non-existence”

NATALIE C. BARNEY

We are going to consider the feeling and knowing phases at the individual level as they imply personally becoming aware of the situation being faced and the reasons for that. The empowering and wanting are going to be addressed together with the collective dimension as it is from joint action and the coordination of the strategic interests that the

necessary conditions are established that enable the willingness and possibility of the doing phase to produce the transformative change. A change that goes far beyond the individual situation of each woman and which improves the conditions and position of all the women engaged in local politics.



● THE INDIVIDUAL LEVEL (FEELING AND KNOWING)

Let us begin, in this case, by focusing on the two first stages of the transformation process as they are the ones that enable people to be understood and seen in context, to be placed in an oppressive social structure and are, therefore, the ones that provide motivation to act accordingly. We consider feeling and knowing as stages that can occur in tandem, as feeling is at the same time the consequence of knowing (the more that is known about the consequences of the hetero-patriarchal system, the more is known about the

consequences and limitations that gender mandates generate in the life of women and men, the more is felt and the more knowledge is sought on the factors influencing it). It is important to listen and give authority, in the feeling, to the pain and injuries of women if the aim is to start searching in order to understand and then transform them.

They are, therefore, awareness-raising and sensitizing premises for empowerment and wanting to do, and, consequently, to act and transform.

*“Nothing in life is to be feared.
Only to be understood”*

MARIE CURIE

Therefore, the starting point can be knowledge...

There are many women who mention the need to train as a condition to enter politics. In this regard, the lack of time that the majority of elected women suffer from due to the difficulties of finding time for all their many responsibilities is an added difficulty. Even though it would be necessary to highlight this difficulty both in the public sphere (with the rest of the male and female colleagues to search for more collective strategies) and in the private sphere (negotiating care tasks and looking for practical solutions), it is also necessary to consider learning as an ongoing process and identifying its sources and contents beyond typical training. Thus, in order to address specific policies, comparing with people or groups that work in this area can be a tool to help be better positioned. Thus, both the

technical staff in the case of the municipalities who have them, and the groups who from their activism know the sphere and other key people who have worked in the same situation, can contribute greatly and facilitate the location and definition of specific objectives.

Establishing the sphere of actions and the options resulting from the work in different municipal areas means that plans can be prepared that help to define the path to be followed during the parliamentary term and to have the tools that make it possible to adapt the planning according to the needs arising during its implementation. However, the expertise that we can generally access does not usually include a gender analysis. Establishing the specific situation of the men and women of the municipality where you are going to hold office is key in your work as a politician. Having data and information broken down by sex

which helps to identify possible inequality benchmarks, along with prior indicators of the impact of the policies that they are going to develop, allow corrective measures to be included in the respective plans to enable equal conditions for men and women.

Virginia Woolf Basqueskola allows this type of knowledge to be accessed through seminars dealing with different topics related to local politics from a gender perspective, and it facilitates the creation of knowledge about areas related to local political and women through its line of studies.

Apart from this type of knowledge, skills-building in different areas

to hold office is also fundamental. Communication techniques are an example of this. The aforementioned gender division of work along with differentiated socialisation means that some women have little experience and find it harder to express themselves in public. If that were the case, learning of specific techniques that also help to highlight the gender constraints is an efficient strategy that, along with the practice, will help to develop an effective communication model that is in keeping with what they want to transmit.

These and other skills such as leadership are also area facilitated through Virginia Woolf Basqueskola.

“Only since women have begun to feel at home on this earth has a Rosa Luxemburg or a Mme Curie emerged. They brilliantly demonstrate that it is not women’s inferiority that has determined their historical insignificance: it is their historical insignificance that has doomed them to inferiority”

SIMONE DE BEAUVOIR

Along with looking for role models and benchmarks...

It is essential to have female benchmarks who work in the public arena in order to improve the life standards of the general public and who are driven by the desire to achieve gender equality. There have always existed different way of doing things and it has been precisely the inability to see them and value them which has allowed them to be eroded. We are talking about finding transformative leadership role models, which are based on people and which respond to awareness on the situations of inequality and to a commitment to fight against

them. Raising the concept of new leaderships ultimately involves dismantling the idea that see leadership as something that responds to the “special” and “extraordinary” characteristics that some people have. Furthermore, opting to share leadership with other women and highlighting those models that have helped to foster equality between women and men is a tool that can help us in our work.

Virginia Woolf Basqueskola regularly produces a newsletter that features women’s experiences that can be benchmarks and has a media library when people can see interviews with women that are examples of

Frances Pepper (left) and Elizabeth Smith (right) working in the offices of *The Suffragist* 1913-1921



other ways of engaging in politics and of policy making in general and at local level specifically. Exploring methodologies such as mentoring with women who already have experience in local politics and who

can open up the way for others means that we do not have to start from zero again and again, but rather the experience of other women can be used.

“Self-care not only makes up set limits for ourselves, but also to be aware that we are not omnipotent and that all the inequalities that we want to transform must be addressed collectively. Thinking about ourselves becomes dangerous and profoundly threatening to the Patriarchy, as it breaks with the logic of the “martyrology”

ANA MARÍA HERNÁNDEZ

and practice self-care...

Even though it seems obvious and logical, women sometime tend to give priority for caring for their immediate circle and forget about looking after their own needs. Gender mandates here involve, in the case of women, serving others without caring for their own wellbeing and forgetting, on the other hand, that it is necessary to look after the latter in order to assume other tasks. Studies⁸ on the use of time precisely ratify the smaller amount of time that

women dedicate to self-care and leisure even though the stereotypes indicate precisely the contrary. The main reason alleged is the burden of care work arising from the existing lack of co-responsibility.

If care and sustaining life appear as core areas of the political agenda on the common agenda of the female elected officials, it should also be applied at a personal level. Personal care and individual wellbeing are essential aspects in order to hold office properly.

⁸ Emakunde report “Figures on the situation of women and men in the Basque Country”

“The feminist creeper comprises many knots and many ties that go unseen by the controlling eyes of the patriarchal order”

MARCELA LAGARDE

● THE COLLECTIVE LEVEL (WANTING AND EMPOWERING)

The use of one’s own room to find ourselves unavoidably causes us to look at our surroundings from another perspective and find from this approach reaching out to other women that we can invite them to share that space along the path. It is from that sharing of own spaces from where the conditions are generated for the transformative changes that we are seeking.

We are talking about generating networks between women, networks around common goals that seek to improve the conditions and positions of women, who are

looking for fairer relationship and social models. That is, networks built around gender strategic interests that we have already discussed.

We here stress the need to accommodate alternative relationship models because generating networks between women in a space such as institutional politics radically goes against the partisan dynamics. On this point, we must perform an honest and comprehensive analysis in order to see that what occurs in reality is a shattering of gender

“Women try harder at improving their relationships with men. But the most important thing is to change the relationships between women”

KATE MILLET

mandates. When networks are created with and between women in keeping with their strategic interests by seeking alternatives to models and systems that oppress them, the resistances multiply.

This generating of networks must not be taken from the essentialism perspective, as we are not arguing that creating them is not the prerogative of either sex. We are talking about the need for women to come together around common goals that seek to question gender mandates, mandates that constrain women and men, and which oppress and delegate the former to the background.

Striving in this direction would facilitate the generating of networks around transformative equality policies and consensus about

essential policies to improve the living conditions of people.

Furthermore, the setting up of these networks involves understanding and respecting the diversity among women, establishing guidelines to respect and listen, creating an atmosphere of trust and responding to care ethical criteria.

Based on this premise, Virginia Woolf Basqueskola helps to bring women elected officials together around issues that enable their empowerment and the enhancement and effectiveness of equality policies. It thus seeks to foster the generation of networks of female politicians around the designing of common agendas.

“The sisterhood is a practical, political and ethical dimension of contemporary feminism. It is an experience of women that leads to the search for positive relations and to the political and existential alliance, side by side, subjectivity to subjectivity with other women, to contribute with specific actions for the social elimination of all types of oppression and for mutual support to achieve the generic power of all women and for the vital empowerment of each woman”

MARCELA LAGARDE

“No real social change has ever been brought about without a revolution. People are either not familiar with their history, or they have not yet learned that revolution is but thought carried into action”

EMMA GOLDMAN

● THE TRANSFORMATIVE LEVEL (DOING)

Having one's own space to facilitate the awareness-raising and gender analysis process of women, sharing that space with other women and defining strategies to create transformative policies would not be sufficient if the aim is to transform the social model. This process needs to benefit the management of the public sphere carried out from the local councils. The work of these networks, the agreements and consensus around policies that seek to improve the quality of life of the general public needs to be shifted to the decision-making arena, negotiated and

studied with those people who have not been involved in their design and seeking their involvement as far as possible.

When defining equality policies, it is also important to identify those colleagues who given their activism and political practice are included those ways of engaging, and they also support a fairer social model for women and men based on the setting up of alliances. Yet at the same time, the importance must also not be forgotten of establishing dynamics that overcome the mistrust that this way of engaging may generate in the others, in those

“It is essential to network, with women helping one another, sharing information, convening international protests, showcasing our work to a greater extent, being willing to work with feminist men, with the LGBT community, with all the social movements who fight for a better world. The network is the future as it connects us to all women even in the most repressive countries. Because inequality is a global phenomenon in nearly all the cultures of the planet, the struggle and its elimination also have to be global”

CORAL HERRERA

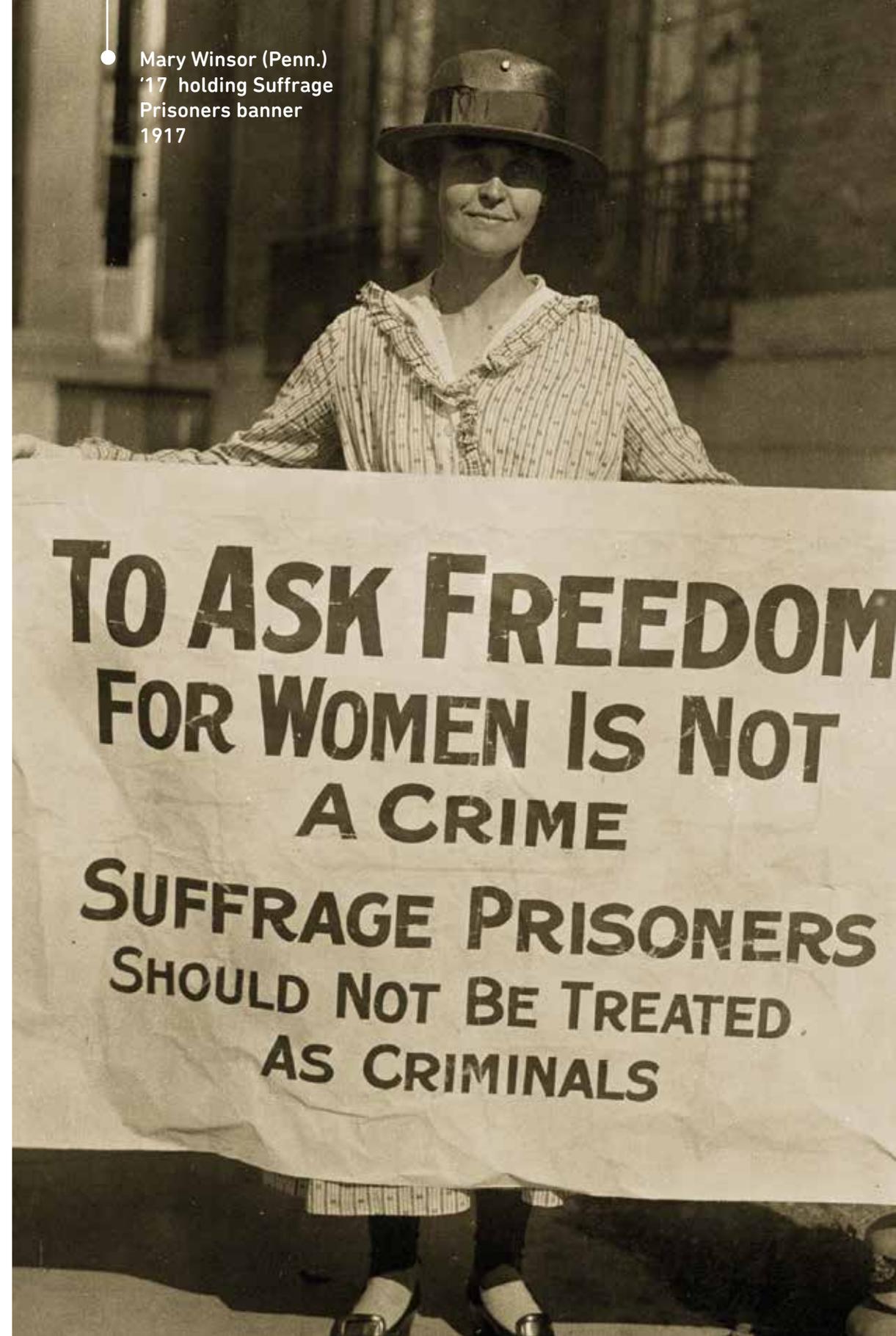
people who from more excluding and more traditional dynamics do not know the potentials that this management model of the public arena can offer, or that even if they know them are reluctant to support them.

Those strategies agreed in our own room need to be shifted to a wider audience so that values such as equality and sisterhood are included in the political agendas of the administrations, by fostering practices leading to democratisation

and facilitating awareness-raising processes and empowerment among the general public.

Basqueskola seeks to be that own room where to facilitate the awareness-raising and individual knowledge, the setting up of networks and designing collective agendas around the strategic interests of female politicians and of local equality policies, along with the impact to achieve a transformative local policy.

Mary Winsor (Penn.)
'17 holding Suffrage
Prisoners banner
1917



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