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**The metagovernance of policy networks for gender equity: lessons learned
from Medellin-Colombia**

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Abstract

Gender equity is a broad and comprehensive goal that involves all aspects of human life in society. For public policy studies, this means that there are many issues, agendas, actors and conflicts that somehow relate to this goal. In fact, some of these issues can advance unevenly and contradictorily in different arenas of public policy. For example, a country can pass progressive legislation on sexual and reproductive rights for women and, at the same time, be inequitable in issues related with income and political power distribution (glass ceilings). This implies that conventional forms of governance concentrated exclusively on state, market, community or family mechanisms are insufficient to achieve true gender equity. In this sense, this paper presents three great lessons learned in the construction of the gender equity policy in Medellín-Colombia. First, it shows the importance of structuring *well* the public problem of gender equity through its different dimensions, issues and intersections. Second, it points out that building the causal relations of issues involved with gender equity is a major problem. Third, it points out how the formulation of a policy of gender equity should privilege the construction of policy networks across different sectors of government, firms, communities and families if it really wants to achieve gender mainstreaming. In this sense, this paper proposes that for the effective implementation of gender equity policy, it should adopt a network management approach based on metagovernance. This means recognizing that the local state alone cannot achieve a goal that involves all aspects of human life in society. Therefore, the local state must metagovern other actors of the market, society and family to implement this policy and thus reach the difficult but indispensable goal of gender equality between women and men.

Keywords: Metagovernance; Public Policy; Gender Equity Policy; Colombia - Latin America.

Introduction

This paper is the result of joint work between the local government of Medellin-Colombia and EAFIT University for the reformulation of policy for women and gender equality. Thus, learning includes multiple people involved with this policy -bureaucrats, activists, academics, politicians ... - and their experiences in recent years (2016-2017). Still, the idea is to present lessons that can be interpreted more generally in other parts of the world.

1. First lesson

Can't see the forest for the trees: the importance of structuring public problems

Gender equity is a broad and general goal that societies and States aim to reach eliminating inequalities historically constructed between men and women. To achieve this, most Western states sign and ratify international treaties on behalf of human rights for women, make laws and design public policies that promote gender equality¹. Depending on the historical trajectory of each country, this goal has remained on the governmental agenda with varying intensity since the 70s until today. In fact, currently any government that bills itself as liberal and democratic can't exclude or block gender equity on their list of interests.

But despite these important regulatory advances, the effective realization of gender equality in all dimensions of human life has not been achieved anywhere in the world². For example, according to projections by the World Economic Forum, the economic gender gap will only close in 47 years in Western Europe, 61 in Latin America, 63 in sub-Saharan Africa, 93 in Central and Eastern Europe, 111 in East Asia, 356 in the Greater Middle East, more than 1,000 years in South Asia and extraordinarily economic gap is widening in North America (Leopold and Stefanova, 2016).

However, there is a latent problem when thinking about gender equity only through specific issues such as the economic gap. This is problematic because gender relations involve every dimensions of human life, and it is almost impossible to know the advances and setbacks made by a particular society at the same time. For example, it is often thought that stable

¹Gender equality is "an ideal condition in which all men and all women have the same opportunities to participate in politics, economy and society. Their roles are equally valued and none suffers from disadvantages based on gender. In addition, both are considered free and autonomous beings with dignity and rights "(Htun and Waldon, 2010, 213).

² However, it is now recognized that Iceland is the country that is closer to closing gender gaps (WEF, 2016).

democracies in developed countries are more progressive when it comes to gender equality. However,

Sweden offers generous parental leave and day care but has been slow to combat violence against women. In fact, the governments in the “macho” countries of Latin America did far more to mitigate violence against women than the “women-friendly” Scandinavian welfare states (Htun and Waldon, 2010, 207).

The same applies when compare the abortion issue between Italy and Ireland. In the country of the headquarters of the Vatican, abortion is not only permitted, but is subsidized by the state, while in Catholic Ireland is still criminalized. In America, the Costa Rican large maternity leave contrast with the precarious working conditions of American mothers. And the late adoption of women's suffrage in Appenzell, a small Swiss canton in 1989 is far away from Uruguayan early approval in 1927.

It is even possible to find contradictions in a country where different gender issues are compared. In Japan, the third largest economy, women have the highest life expectancy in the world, along with literacy rates and coverage in primary and secondary education broadly equitable between men and women (WEF, 2016). However, Japan is one of the worst countries in matters related to the economy and women's work. According to the Index glass ceiling made by The Economist (2014), Japan and South Korea have deep resistance to having women occupy senior decision on the boards. And this without considering that 1 in 3 Japanese women have been victims of workplace sexual harassment (The Japan Times, 2016).

Does this data mean that Latin American and Italian women live better than Swedish, American, Swiss or Japanese women? Not necessarily. The point is that when you focus too much on any gender issues in particular, can't see the forest for the trees. Therefore, the projections of the World Economic Forum on closing the economic gender gap may vary when other issues are discussed. This means recognizing that "gender policies do not involve a single issue but many, and each issue involves different actors and [active different] conflicts" (Htun and Waldon, 2010, 208).

Hence, think about gender equality from the perspectives of the trees and the forest at the same time, enabling broader perspective on development and gender equity. On one hand, this help us to avoid misunderstandings showing that gender inequality is not exclusive to the poor and de-industrialized countries and, on the other hand, it shows that it is impossible for a

government alone to reach a goal as broad and general without involving market players, networks and families. In some way, the relationship between these actors, as social coordination mechanisms (Jessop, 2016), is related to the welfare regime of a country and therefore the gender (in)equality (Esping-Andersen, 2000).

1.1. Dimensions

To order the wide range of issues related with gender equality, public policies on women and gender equality have been forced to define thematic lines, strategic components or dimensions of action which seek to structure government, private sector, networks or families interventions. These dimensions are larger areas of human existence related to public and individual welfare of citizens, such as education, health, safety, environment, among many others (these may or may not coincide with the sectoral organization of public administrations).

For example, in the international context, the Beijing Action Plan (1995) defined 12 "areas of concern"³ and the European Union, through the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE), established 19 policy areas to implement the strategy of gender mainstreaming.⁴ Recently, in the regional context, the XIII Regional Conference on Women in Latin America and the Caribbean ECLAC (2016), established that the "strategy of Montevideo" settle for 10 axes of implementation.⁵ In Colombia, the National Policy for Gender Equality formulated in government executive order -CONPES 161-, defines 6 themes related to the historical trajectory of the country.⁶ In the case of Medellín's local government, the municipal

³ Women and poverty, education and training of women, women and health, violence against women, women and armed conflicts, women and economy, women in the exercise of power and decision-making, institutional mechanisms for the advancement of women, human rights of women, women and media, women and the environment, the girl.

⁴ Agriculture and rural development, justice, culture, poverty, digital agenda, maritime affairs and fisheries, economic and financial affairs, regional policy, education, research, employment, sport, energy, tourism, entrepreneurship, transport, environment and climate change, youth and health.

⁵ Equality and the rule of law, communication, institutions, technology, popular and citizen participation, cooperation, building and strengthening state capacities, information systems, financing and monitoring, evaluation and accountability.

⁶ Peacebuilding and cultural transformation, economic autonomy and access to active participation in the scenes of power and decision-making, health and sexual and reproductive rights, gender in education and comprehensive plan to guarantee women a life free of violence.

Agreement 22 of 2003 promulgated the "Public Policy for Urban and Rural Women" contains 13 specific goals to achieve "equitable and sustainable human development".⁷

1.2. Issues

In turn, each of these thematic lines, transverse axes, strategic components or dimensions of action consist of a set of issues. That is, specific aspects of reality that can be politically problematized in a particular historical context. For example, human trafficking, femicide, maternal mortality, illiteracy, glass ceilings or cyberbullying are aspects of reality politically problematized. It means that the issues are perceived as public problems. Each and every one of these issues are the trees and the forest of gender equality governance.

However, the process of defining, problematize and agenda-setting of any issue is a deeply political question which enables or disables various social conflicts (Birkland, 2015; Htun and Weldon, 2010). In practice, multiple actors, ideas and interests dispute the political and media control of public problems, for this reason, its definition is constantly changing. As Garraud (2009) notes "the way in which an issue is constructed, determine the forms that is thinkable and treated. In this sense ... there are not public problems "by nature" but that every public problem is a social construction "(p. 61).

Moreover, since gender equality is a transversal goal to all dimensions of life, issues that materialize are part of all sectors of public administrations, and are determined by market's, civil society's and the family's conditions. For traditional public administration organized under the capitalist principle of governmental division of labor, cross-sectoral goals policies represent a great challenge. In words of Muller (2009), trans-sectoral public policies are "policies that do not identify with one sector but must be integrated into all the existing sectors. This is the case of gender mainstreaming policies or administrative reform policies "(p. 408).

Therefore, it is understood that the effective realization of gender equality is not achieved in the abstract, but on the contrary, requires specific actions on public issues that depend on other sectors of public administration -private actors and families-. Hence

⁷ Institutional development, information, education, information system for gender equality and the overall development of women, human rights, women's networks, health, access and appropriation of goods and services, employment, peaceful coexistence, participation and organization, conflict social and armed movement, access, coordination and control of resources

... cross-sectoral authorities are created in countries to address important issues that transcend the action of a single sector. A topic becomes crosscutting authority not only by decree, but when other sectors assume the subject and the decisions of that authority as binding. That means an assumption of the importance of the issue first and then the ability of the institution to properly direct the action on the subject (Solano, 2007, 4).

Obviously, in practice, there are significant challenges when mainstreaming collective goals such as gender equality. It's very common to find that the traditional sectors of public administrations feel uncomfortable with mainstreaming goals. They feel their space is being invaded and think is putting them an additional burden, and they fail to see the relationship between these collective goals with their own work. And belittle the collective work especially when they have sufficient economic resources to operate independently (Solano, 2007).

1.3. Intersections

In addition to the inherent complexity of all issues that make up the dimensions related to gender equality, there is an additional challenge. Since the late 80s, black feminism literature drew attention to intersections where gender and race intersect to give rise to new forms of discrimination. In one of his pioneering work, Crenshaw (1991) noted that used

... the concept of intersectionality to denote the different ways in which race and gender interact to frame the multiple dimensions of black women and their experiences with employment. [Its] objective was to illustrate that many of the experiences that black women face are not subsumed within the traditional boundaries of racial or gender discrimination ... and that the intersection of the factors of racism and sexism is experienced by black women in ways that cannot be captured fully looking at the dimensions of race or gender of those experiences separately (p. 1244).

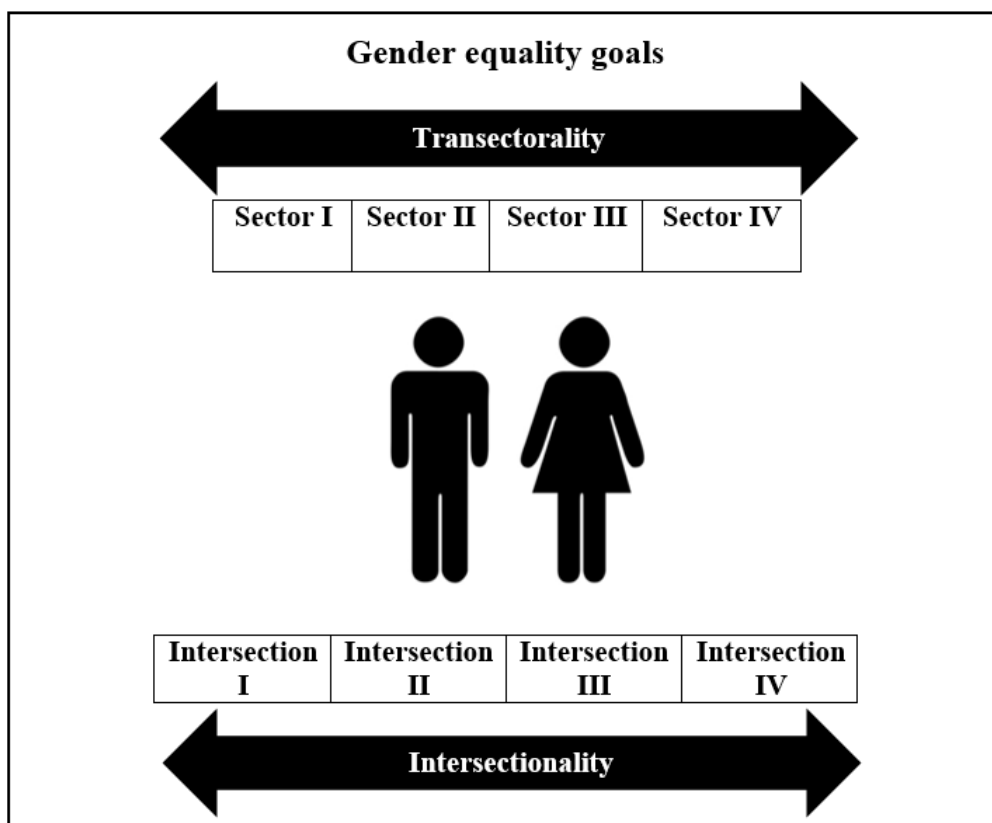
This intersectional perspective of public affairs related to women and gender equality, not only can increase sensitivity to the inequalities that operate daily in society and in the market, but also allows to recognize that women are not one homogeneous group. In fact, today the concept of intersectionality is sensitive to differences that are based on features such as race, gender, ethnicity, class, nationality, sexual orientation, age-generation, profession, religion, territorial origin, fertility, language, level of education, victimization , disability or political preferences.

This helps recognize that intersections are not issues or dimensions *per se* but, in fact, are related in more or less specific issues. For example, rural women are not a "dimension" of

public policy, but a specific intersection related more with issues such as food security, economic autonomy, illiteracy, access to credit or property rights over land. In addition, issues such as teenage pregnancy and unemployment are exacerbated at the intersection between young and indigenous women.

In terms of public administration, there is also an important policy mainstreaming intersectional challenge. This challenge stems from the fact that women are not a population or a particular population group, but are half of all other populations: half of the indigenous population, the rural population, victims, youth, children, the population in prison, among others. Thus, gender mainstreaming is not limited to the different sectors of government, but must be extended to other intersections (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Gender equality goals, transectorality and intersectionality



Source: self-made

In this sense and retaking all previous contributions, the technical team of public policy at the EAFIT University identified 12 dimensions related to the overall goal of gender equality between men and women. With these dimensions, it seeks to structure a logical and orderly manner possible government's, private's network's and family's interventions aimed at

gender equality in all dimensions of human life: 1) violence against women, 2) health and sexual and reproductive health, 3) education, 4) economic autonomy and labor; 5) social and political empowerment, participation and representation, 6) institutionalization and information systems 7), culture, recreation and sport, 8) planning and environment 9) armed conflict and peace, 10) communications and ICTs 11), science innovation and knowledge production and 12) State in the territory.

2. Second lesson

If X then Y: causal theories (narratives) in gender equity policy

After presenting the complex picture related to public issues of gender equity, its dimensions, issues and intersections, it is important to establish how these causally relate to each other.⁸ Doing this is important because

...social problems are very complex [and] it is not surprising that developing causal theories about how the social world works is very difficult. If one develops the wrong causal theory, no policy, no matter how well crafted, is likely to have a positive impact on the problem under consideration (Birkland, 2015, 242).

As seen in Figure 2, the most important causal relations for the city of Medellín⁹ can be summarized using the following no-mathematical model. Obviously, in practice, all dimensions of life are interrelated, but this model aims to simplify some of them to explain them better. The three top corners involve central aspects of social policy or welfare regime and, therefore, any change in any of them have important implications in another.

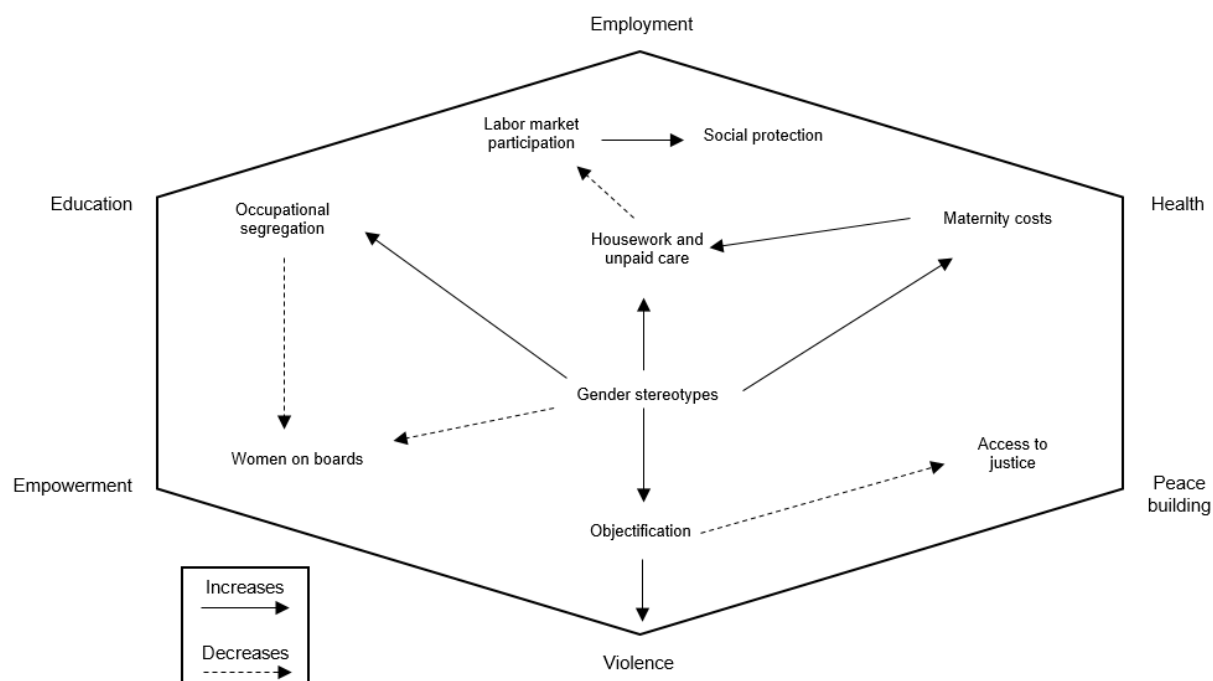
For example, the income revenue that is represented through participation in the labor market strongly depends on the amount of housework and unpaid care that women have. In Colombia “89.4% of women perform, during an average day, [non-paid] work activities with an average time of 7 hours and 23 minutes, while 63.1% of men do the same type of activities in 3 hours and 10 minutes on average” (Dane-ENUT, 2013). As in all familialistic welfare regimes, the relationship with the system of social protection of workers in Medellín depends on its

⁸ To do this, this section takes up the classic lasswellian distinction between *knowledge of* and *knowledge in* the policy process and use the second (Weimer, 2008).

⁹ According to the criteria of (international, national and local) agenda gravity inferred from the qualitative and quantitative evidence and technical feasibility.

monetary link with the labor market (formal or informal). In fact, for many women "... the functional equivalent of market dependence is the dependence of the family. In other words, female independence needs "defamiliarize" obligations concerning with welfare "(Esping-Andersen, 2000, 65).

Figure 2. Summary of causal relations between dimensions and issues



Source: self-made

Domestic and unpaid care work is conditioned by gender stereotypes, and in the case of Medellin the familialistic visions predominate. Therefore, motherhood represents for women (especially young women) a direct cost that is not taken by any other social coordination mechanism –mainly hierarchies or markets-. In addition, the vertical and horizontal occupational segregation that reproduce gender stereotypes, since early education, makes women have lower job status and lower wages in the labor market. And at the same time, it makes it more difficult for them to reach senior decision on public's, private's and third's sector boards. For example, in the case of the European Union

The workforce in the healthcare sector is dominated by women, with 78% of workers being female in the EU-28. Both vertical and horizontal occupational segregation can be observed when comparing women's and men's healthcare positions. On the one hand, women are under-represented in managerial and decision-making positions. On the other hand, the female healthcare workforce is usually concentrated in occupations such as nursing, midwifery and

other ‘care’ professions such as community health workers. These occupations tend to be perceived as low-status jobs, while medicine, dentistry and pharmacy (positions mostly occupied by men) are understood as high-status occupations.¹⁰

Indeed, this not only reduces the income of women but also their empowerment. In the case of violence against women, much of this is related to the objectification of the female body that promotes traditional division of gender roles within society. What's more, the objectification of women somehow implies that their problems are trivialized and/or caricatured and therefore don't have attention in the judicial system. This has generated incredibly high levels of impunity in everything related to violence against women. For example,

... in relation to justice cases of sexual violence to women in the Municipality of Medellin the first quarter of 2014, according to the Superior Council of the Judiciary (2014) is 1566 cases admitted in the judicial system and 27 cases with conviction. These data also show difficulties in obtaining justice, since only 2% of total cases reported as entered in the system of justice obtained sentence (Corporación Humanas, 2015, 56).

After presenting an overview of the different causal relationships involved with issues of gender equality, there are several important open questions. What is the most appropriate way to solve these public problems? Since each public issue involves different *issue networks* with different actors and conflicts, How to properly manage public policies on women and gender equality? Ultimately, How to govern the complexity of a public policy related to all aspects of human life? Part of the answer lies in the theoretical developments on metagovernance, and some input from network management, social policy and welfare regimes theory (Meuleman, 2008; Jessop, 2016; Esping-Andersen, 2000).

3. Third lesson

The metagovernance of social coordination mechanisms involved in policy networks for gender equity

There are four basic modes of social coordination or governance that solve problems or people: markets, states, networks and “families” (Jessop, 2016, p. 168).

- The market can be understood as an institution in which individuals or collective agents exchange goods and services. It organizes production and consumption of goods and services through the decentralized decisions of many companies and

¹⁰ <http://eige.europa.eu/gender-mainstreaming/policy-areas/health>

individuals without any central authority through the mechanism of competition, which acts as a social external coercive force for economic actors that under an idealized model of perfect competition, rewards talent and punishes laziness.

- The state is an organization with coercive power, different groups of family or kinship, which exerts a clear priority over any other organization within a defined territory exclusive manner (sovereignty) (Tilly, 1992; O'Donnell, 2008). It produces and maintains a social order based on the idea of general interest imposed on individual wills. The state centralizes and claims for itself -with success- monopoly of legitimate physical violence, establishing property rights, controlling and regulating information society (hegemony).
- Networks or communities are groups of actors who share a location or geographic area, or have common interests, traits or characteristics (territorial communities or interest). Alternative (or complementary) way to markets and states, communities or networks provide goods and services to people closely. They use the constant negotiation of consensus, and usually promote social values, like solidarity, community sense, social capital, participation or inclusivity (Parsons, 2007).
- The family is a group of people related to each other that usually live together and satiate their hunger at the same home. It regulates sexual behavior, socializes its members, cares for and protects children, elderly and disabled, and assigns men and women different socioeconomic roles. All this through the commitment and unconditional loyalty among its members arising from their ties of kinship.

None of those mechanisms are perfect and "failure is a regular feature of daily life, and markets, states and networks, all regularly fail" (Jessop, 2008, p. 383). For example, in the markets there are externalities, public goods, imperfect competition, cartelization, information asymmetries and inequality that blurs the idealized model of perfect competition. In the state there are governments that are predatory, rent seekers -whose worst manifestation is the corruption-, pork barrel, logrolling or selfish maximizers bureaucracies that blurs the idea of violence's monopoly and general interest (Weimer and Vining, 2017; Salamon, 2002; Chang, 2015; Acemoglu and Robinson, 2012). In the case of networks

... do not always include all the relevant and affected actors; those who are included might find it difficult to collaborate, and it is far from certain that the outcome of the collaboration process is exploited to its full potential and aligned with larger governance initiatives" (Sørensen, 2014, 6).

In fact, "... there is no reason to assume that members of networks become more saintly as a function of having joined these structures, so that the pursuit of private interest will remain a central feature of the policy process" (Peters, 2007, p. 1). Obviously, this blurs the democratic horizontality assumed by some theorists of governance networks.

The case of family failures is more problematic than the others. In the literature of metagovernance, the family is little theorized as specific mode of governance (this is a big theoretical void). But you can identify family's failures, as the familiarism (Esping-Andersen, 2000), the "amoral" familiarism (Banfield, 1958) or domestic violence, in the literature that internalized feminist critics. Based on the social policy theory literature, this critics point out that the family isn't a natural or pre-political institutions, it is a political institution (O'Connor, 1996).

In any case, as a way to understand the failures of social coordination modes while a proposed solution, Bob Jessop coined in the late 90s the concept of metagovernance (Meuleman, 2008). Generally speaking, metagovernance is the coordination of the different modes of governance and "aims to enable the resolution of complex and multi-dimensional public issues in a more efficient and democratic manner than would be possible by using one single governance approach for all challenges" (Meuleman *et al.* 2017, 9). In this senses and for this case, we assumed a prescriptive or normative view of metagovernance, instead of a descriptive or positive view.

In this view, it is clear that the main function of metagovernance lies in the state¹¹ (Bell and Hindmoor, 2009; Zurbriggen, 2012), but this does not imply a return to classic hierarchical command and control mechanisms. Conversely,

... metagovernors must respect the capacity for self-regulation of the interactive governance arenas in order to preserve the commitment of the public and private actors. As such, the concept of metagovernance does not, as it has been suggested, endeavor to "bring the State back in" by insisting on its omnipotence and, consequently, reduce governance to "the tools, strategies and relationships used by governments to help govern" (Bell and Hindmoor, 2009: 191). Rather, the notion of metagovernance offers a way of balancing state-centred and society-centred views on how society and the economy are governed (Torfing *et al.* 2012, 132)

3.1. Functions of metagovernance in gender equity policy: some notes

¹¹ "The purpose of metagovernance is to some extent regain political control and the imposition of political organizations orientation within and outside the public sector after reforms based on the paradigms of NPM and governance networks" (Zurbriggen, 2012 , p.4).

Recognizing the multiplicity of networks involved in gender equity issues, metagovernance is presented as the most promising normative approach to managing the interdependent networks of public, private and social actors in multiple sectors, levels of government and modes governance. As Peters (2007) notes,

The need for more centralized “meta-governance” is evident... for reasons of improving the policy coherence of government interventions. Likewise, the same demands for coordination and coherence arise with respect to the use of sub-national governments and agencies as the mechanisms for delivering governance. If each policy network, or each agency, is capable of establishing its own priorities with little reference to other needs and priorities within the public sector... then the overall governing capacity of the system will be diminished (p. 2).

In fact, we know that when the focus of metagovernance is absent in the gender equality policies is possible to find some of the following problems: (i) what is a reality of multiple hierarchies, markets, networks and families is assumed as a single and unified hierarchy; (ii) attempts to manage with the paradigm of direct bureaucracy, when in fact the possible scope is quite limited; (iii) forget multiple indirect instruments of governance through which you can manage gender equity policies; (iv) over-simplifies the coordinating role of government agencies responsible for these policies and (v) it is assumed that with some relatively functional spaces formal dialogue can coordinate these complex networks of governance.

Hence, when the metagovernance approach is absent, it can be easily forgotten that the real capacity of gender policy networks to achieve their goals depends on how they are metagoverned. Nevertheless,

The metagovernance of governance networks is a complex and different matter, and it can easily go wrong. It consists in a careful balancing of two opposites: being able to control a governance network, and granting it the autonomy needed to function well. Too much control undermines the self-governing capacity of governance networks, and too little intervention results in fragmentation and lack of direction and coordination in governance initiatives (Sørensen, 2014, 7).

For us, the normative approach of metagovernance can help properly manage policies on women and gender equality in several ways.

First, ***governing governance***, that is, adjust the relative weight of each of the modes of governance -more or less hierarchical, more or less market and so on-; rebalance the differences of power between participants with the aim of democratizing governance

networks; and eventually assume ultimate political responsibility for failures of any mode of governance -accountability-.

Second, ***regulating governance***, namely to ensure a favorable environment for governance through institutional design; establish rules for the functioning of markets, hierarchies, networks and families to bring coherence to the whole public action; settling disputes among participants in governance and act as a mediator or judge between them.

Third, ***persuading actors of governance***, that is, frame the policy issues and build shared discursive structures among all stakeholders (mainstreaming); create and organize forums for dialogue helping different policy communities can communicate effectively with each other; keep the focus on longer-term visions; encourage self-reflection on the achievements and failures of the four modes of governance; increase the tool box of metagovernors (i.e. nudge-based instruments). Like Meuleman (2008) notes "if you only have a hammer, you tend to see every problem as a nail" (p. 67).

Fourth, ***steering the actors of governance***, that is, threatening them with the shadow of hierarchy, autonomous actors think that if they themselves do not find shared solutions to their problems, the government will do it for them (Sørensen, 2014) and, finally, ensure soft enforcement of the agreements produced within the framework of governance networks.

These general functions of metagovernance are not a list of recipes, but they are an important way to organize the set of tasks that a metagovernor should make when managing the networks for gender equality policies. In addition, each country must consider its own advantages and limitations when attempting to apply the approach of metagovernance. This is important because, in fact, is not yet clear whether the application of the approach will be successful or not.

Conclusions and final questions

This paper presented the three main lessons we have learned in the process of constructing the gender equality policy in Medellin, Colombia. First, it demonstrated the importance of structuring *well* the public problem of gender inequality through its different dimensions, issues and intersections. Second, we spoke of the importance of having clear causal relationships involved in gender equality and, finally, presented some notes on the need to manage network of gender equality policies through the metagovernance approach -in prescriptive sense-.

However, the paper also leaves some open questions to be resolved. In terms of structuring the public problem, what are the issues and major intersections to which we should pay attention? Why? In terms of the construction of causal theories, what is the causal narrative that best explains the problems of gender inequality? How this narrative should condition our public policies? In terms of family and metagovernance, is a fourth mode of social coordination? How specifically interacts with hierarchies, markets and networks? In addition, the metagovernance functions that we propose are not easy to implement and involve a high degree of state capacity, is it possible to metagovern the networks for gender equality in countries in the developing world?

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