Evidence Bite: Feminist democratic innovations in policy and politics

This article from CCINDLE partners Paloma Caravantes and Emanuela Lombardo explores feminist democratic innovations in policy and politics, and will be of interest to project followers. The article conceptualises feminist democratic innovations in local institutional politics, exploring the feminist municipal politics of Barcelona's local government from 2015 to 2023. Democratic innovations in institutional politics refer to processes or institutions aimed at improving the quality of democracy beyond electoral politics by including the voices, knowledge, and experiences of civil society in policy processes. Barcelona's municipal government from 2015 to 2023 provides a fitting example of a public institution introducing innovative policy and politics inspired by progressive social movements and shaped by feminist critical actors from institutions and civil society. The article interprets feminist democratic innovations in policy and politics as actions to transform unequal gender and intersectional hierarchies through intersectional inclusion and participation in both policy content and institutional structures. This evidence bite offers a concise summary of its conclusions.

The article identifies the following **four types of transformation**:

1. **Transforming knowledge:** Knowledge has a prominent role in Barcelona's gender equality policy, both in terms of the articulation of the discourse of a 'feminist city', and as a tool for gender-informed diagnosis and policy solutions.
2. **Transforming policymaking and public funding:** The municipality of Barcelona democratises policymaking regarding inclusion and participation through mainstreaming gender and its intersections – mostly focusing on class – across its policies as well as using gender-related criteria to assign public funding.
3. **Transforming institutions:** Intra-institutional change involves the strengthening of gender equality structures and tools like gender impact assessment reports.
4. **Transforming actors' coalitions:** An effort has been made to expand the municipality's relations with civil society and to increase the participation of feminist organisations in policymaking processes

The analysis of Barcelona highlights three relevant factors that facilitate feminist democratic innovations:

- Top-level political and material support of a self-proclaimed feminist mayor and the party in government
- The feminist knowledge and expertise of local bureaucrats
- The role of civil society actors in participatory processes and as watchdogs scrutinising municipal work

This suggests that the impact of feminist democratic innovations is dependent on political will, and the commitment, knowledge, and

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capacity of institutional and civil society actors. It shows the potential of the feminist project, both in movements and institutions, to advance democratic innovations in policy and politics through encouraging inclusive intersectionality and participatory discourses and practices. You can read the full article here.

For more information on the CCINDLE project, as well as publications, evidence bites, podcasts, videos and more, please visit our website: https://ccindle.org

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