

ESA RESEARCH NETWORK 33WOMEN'S AND GENDER STUDIES

Gender relations in a Changing Europe: knowledge, challenges and future directions

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Title: Beyond the paradigm for the future Women's and Gender Studies? A reflection on the integrated theoretical and methodological contribution of Intersectionality and Transdisciplinarity

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Abstract

This paper explores the critical integration of intersectionality and transdisciplinarity as foundational concepts shaping the future of Women's and Gender Studies (WGS) in Europe. As the discipline evolves, it increasingly engages with diverse methodological approaches and theoretical frameworks that transcend traditional boundaries, fostering a more inclusive and holistic understanding of gender dynamics. Intersectionality, a term coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw, emphasizes the interconnected nature of social categorizations such as race, class, gender, and sexuality, which create overlapping systems of advantage and disadvantage. Embracing this perspective allows for a nuanced exploration of how these intersections influence individual and collective experiences.

Transdisciplinarity, on the other hand, refers to the integration of insights and methodologies from multiple disciplines to address complex social issues related to gender. This approach encourages collaboration among scholars, activists, policymakers, and practitioners, leading to innovative solutions and practical applications of research findings. As WGS adapts to contemporary challenges, integrating transdisciplinary perspectives can unveil new research questions and methods that are responsive to the realities faced by diverse groups of women and gender minorities.

In examining future directions for WGS in Europe, it is essential to consider emerging areas of inquiry that reflect global societal shifts. Topics such as digital feminism, environmental justice, and trans rights are pivotal in this landscape. The rise of digital platforms has transformed how gender activism is organized and disseminated, creating new avenues for solidarity and engagement. Additionally, the intersection of gender with environmental issues prompts critical reflections on sustainability and social justice, drawing attention to the unique challenges faced by marginalized communities in the context of ecological concerns.

The main findings to support this proposal come from the STEMMA (Science, Technology, Engineering and Math Motivation & Accessibility) Project, which sees the collaboration of 3 research units, in different disciplines, coming from the CNR National Research Council (IT), Sapienza University of Rome (IT), Kore University of Enna (IT), with the aim of reducing the gap in STEM disciplines, encouraging the implementation of study programs relating to gender and disabilities. The intersectional and transdisciplinary approach favours highlighting the difficulties and obstacles, real and perceived, which can limit access – both for women and for people with visual disabilities – to training and professional paths in STEM areas. Starting from this study, the requirements and specifications are defined to guide the design of tools, digital resources and persuasive technologies capable of motivating and increasing interest and aptitude for STEM in target populations.

The research is based on a Mixed-Methods approach and on a comparative analysis methodology, between different territorial contexts and university and work environments, with the aim of enhancing the socio-cultural, technological, digital and economic dimensions, in an integrated perspective and to define strategies for dissemination, valorization and development of persuasive strategies in the STEM area. The research is carried out at multiple levels, which will then be integrated, that of the stakeholders, with the aim of better positioning the role of the Universities and Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in the panorama of opportunities to promote social inclusion and empowerment, and that of social, cultural processes, communicative and professional, through which subjects, communities and movements attribute meanings to STEM, and structure creative and participatory practices, from a gender and visually impaired sensitive perspective. STEMMA will make available to the community, in addition to the main results of the study conducted, also digital tools and resources to motivate and encourage access to STEAM disciplines, extending the targeted groups – women and person with visual disabilities to those that share some or many of the dimensions of the exclusion.

Methodologically, future research in WGS will benefit from innovative approaches such as the STEMMA one (participatory research, mixed methods, and community-based methodologies that prioritize the voices of those most affected by gender inequalities): by centering the experiences and knowledge of marginalized groups, researchers can develop more reflexive and responsible scholarship and addressed the decision making through a Transformative Justice goal, the keystone for a cohesive and sustainable society.