

NETWORKS AND POWER IN GENDER-ORIENTED COMMUNICATION GOVERNANCE. TOWARDS A SYSTEMATIC ANALYTIC FRAMEWORK

Claudia Padovani* y Elena Paván**

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CORREOS ELECTRÓNICOS: mmclaudia.padovani@unipd.it

melena.pavan@soc.unipd.it

* Claudia Padovani es investigadora del Departamento de Historia y Estudios Políticos de la Universidad de Padova, Italia.

** Elena Pavan es asistente de investigación del Departamento de Historia y Estudios Políticos de la Universidad de Padova, Italia.

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RESUMEN

La relevancia de las diferencias de género en la estructuración de las desigualdades sociales y la relación de poder es ampliamente reconocida. Uno de los principales desafíos es el nexo entre la mujer y los medios de comunicación y la igualdad de oportunidades en las sociedades contemporáneas. En este artículo ofrecemos una visión general del marco analítico de un proyecto de redes de investigación en curso titulado *Gobernabilidad y poder en la comunicación con enfoque de género*, el cual se centró en el nexo entre género y medios de comunicación en los acuerdos la supra-nacionales.

ABSTRACT

The relevance of gender differences in the structure of social inequalities and power relations is widely recognized. One of the main challenges is the connection between women and media and equal opportunities in contemporary societies. This article is an overview of the analytical framework of a research network project entitled *Governance current and power in communication with a gender perspective*, which focused on the nexus between gender and media in the above agreements, nationals.

1. INTRODUCTION

In this article we offer an overview of the analytic framework of an ongoing research project titled *Networks and Power in Gender-oriented Communication Governance*, focused on the nexus between gender and media in supra-national governing arrangements.

The relevance of gender differences to the structuring of social inequalities and power relation is widely acknowledged and the international community has recognized since the mid '90s the nexus between women and media as one of the major challenges to equal opportunities for women in contemporary societies. That recognition, in the context of the Beijing World Conference on Women, has legitimated and in (re)activated a plurality of actors –including governmental and intergovernmental agencies, epistemic communities, professional and advocacy networks– some of which even in previous years had contributed to elaborating provisions and structuring arrangements concerning gender stereotyping and misrepresentation as well as women marginalization and professional discrimination in media systems. Not only stereotypical and discriminatory representation of women but also women's participation in the media and their governance has been outlined as major challenges. More recently, with the explosion of information technologies, newer issues have emerged concerning unequal access to and control of technologies, privacy and surveillance, pornography on the Internet.

Problematic issues have thus been identified and framed; and a number of solutions suggested, including the role and responsibilities of different societal agencies. Yet, in spite of the plurality of initiatives, campaigns and interventions in these diverse but interrelated areas trans-nationally, the governance of gender-related communication remains an insufficiently unexplored area in the context of women and communication scholarship (Jensen, 2005; Byerly & Ross, 2006; Sarikakis & Slade, 2008; Byerly, 2011; Gallagher, 2011): so far, no systematic analysis has been provided to map out relevant actors; no stock-taking exercise has been conducted concerning global initiatives; nor a longitudinal in depth investigation of existing policy provisions has been carried on.

In response to the lack of attention posed by gender and media studies to policy relevant aspects of media development and to gender-relevant components of media policy processes, a research project titled *Networks and Power in Gender-oriented Communication Governance* looks at how communication and gender have come together in relevant policy settings over the past 40 years (and more specifically since the early '90s): it investigates how such processes have been structured and how issues have been framed and placed on the political agenda, including women ability to participate in communication governance; it attempts to "map out" this policy area paying attention to both constitutive elements and processes.

In a context where the global governance of communications is characterized by growing of diversity (of actors and issues) and levels of complexity (due to the interplay of actors and issues), it is crucial to develop adequate analytic and methodological frameworks, and to test such frameworks through empirical investigation, in order to gain a better understanding of the current realities and the challenges ahead (Padovani & Pavan, 2010).

To clarify the conceptual ground, we see Gender-oriented Communication Governance (GoC_Gov) as a thematic sub-field of the broader domain of Global Media and Communication Governance (Raboy & Padovani, 2010); a subfield which presents some of the features that characterize the broader landscape of communication governance: it has become an internationalized domain (Mueller *et al.*, 2004); it creates a normative space within which other decision making discourses take place (Braman, 2006); it may epitomize new forms of governance arising in global politics (Singh, 2002).

In our view, GoC_Gov indicates all those processes and dynamics that aim at orientating and defining governing arrangements in relation to gender and media; it is a field of research and policy practices whose boundaries can be clarified by articulating some key terms:

- *Governance* as the coming together of cognitive, normative and regulatory aspects, which may include community practices, ground-up trans-national mobilizations as well as interventions in policy-settings by a variety of actors and stakeholders.
- *Communication* to indicate contents, processes and technologies which compose a mediated environment within which a gender dimensions is all too often disregarded (including both conventional media and “new media”).
- *Gender-oriented* to indicate a set of practices that promote a social agenda for change based on gender equity in and through any form of mediated communication (in due consideration of the ambiguities and conceptual shifts that have over time characterized reference to “women and media” and, more recently, invited a broader understanding of “gender-related media issues”).

We acknowledge that such field extends across different levels; yet the very focus of the project is on the trans-national and supra-national levels. By empirically analyzing GoC_Gov in the global context, the project aims at shedding new light on the very case study –looking at how principles, norms and rules are articulated via and by trans-national networks– while, at the same time, contributing to a more general understanding of governance processes.

In order to clarify what we think should be the components of an adequate analytic framework to investigate GoC_Gov as a domain, we here describe the research context of *Networks and Power in Gender-Oriented Communication Governance* (par 1), and briefly elaborate on the three areas of concern addressed by the project: the link between gender and media discourses and broader mobilization efforts (both on gender

issues and on other global themes such as global justice); the progressive consolidation of normative frameworks through the operation of institutional processes (such as the UN Decade for Women or the Beijing World Conference) and the subsequent development of media practices oriented toward gender equality; the emergence of multi-actor networks wherein gender and media discourses sustain the consolidation (and renewal) of normative frameworks and their integration into policy processes and outcomes. We conclude the first paragraph by briefly describing the structure and outcome of a mapping exercise of the GoC_Gov domain conducted in the initial stage of the project, and provide reference to available web-based resources.

Secondly, we introduce the methodological approach of the project. To make sense of the vast variability of actors, visions and practices that compose GoC_Gov as a field, we adopt a discursive approach to the study of political dynamics, where the conceptual category of “discourse” is extended to indicate social dialogue practices that are established between institutional and non-institutional actors (Donati, 1992) as well as the pre-requisite for normative frameworks to emerge (Dryzek, 2005; Khagram, Riker & Sikkink, 2002). Moreover, in view of investigating the collective construction of a “Gender&Media discourse” through the interaction of different actors, a relational approach is adopted; one that builds on networks as a powerful metaphor for rendering the complexity of the field, but moves beyond the metaphor to empirically analyze networks as concrete realities in GoC_Gov.

We conclude discussing the relevance of a mapping and network approach to the study of GoC_Gov in support of research, advocacy and policy-making interventions.

1. TOWARDS AN ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORKS FOR THE STUDY OF GENDER-ORIENTED COMMUNICATION GOVERNANCE

The project *Networks and Power in Gender-oriented Communication Governance*¹ aims at empirically analyzes the area of trans-national communication governance that focuses on the nexus between women, media and communication. The final aim of the project is to provide an articulated overview of GoC_Gov as it evolved over the past decades, with a special focus on the last 20 or so years, at the same time contributing to shed new light on the conduct and mechanisms of international politics, looking at how normative frameworks evolve in the supra-national context, through the intervention of a plurality of interacting actors. Moreover, the project aims at producing relevant knowledge to support activities carried on by researchers, activists, media professionals and policy makers and strengthen stakeholders’ capacity to act in the ever-changing media and communication governance environment.

¹ The project is funded by the University of Padova, Italy, for the period March 2011-February 2013.

1.1 PROMOTING SOCIAL CHANGE TOWARDS GENDER EQUITY THROUGH COMMUNICATION GOVERNANCE

We understand from available literature and documentation that the whole thematic area of women and media has become visible, and somehow prominent, on the international scene around the mid '70s. This development can be associated with the emerging global women's movement (or women's rights movement) (Harcourt, 2006; Dufour *et al.*, 2010; Eschle & Maiguasca, 2010), also strengthened through international events and official declarations –from Mexico City in 1975 to Beijing in 1995, passing through Copenhagen in 1980 and Nairobi in 1985– that have contributed to making the theme “women and media” an internationally recognized issue.

In the same time span we have also witnessed social mobilization developing trans-nationally and focused specifically on information and communication, and later media reform and media justice (Calabrese, 2004; O'Siochru, 2005; Hackett & Carroll, 2006; Napoli, 2007; Padovani & Pavan, 2009; Kidd, Rodriguez & Stein, 2009). In this case as well, mobilizations have paralleled international debates where intergovernmental organizations engaged in debates and produced reports and declarations, such as those debates concerning unbalances in the world information environment, which inspired interventions, especially from the Non Aligned Movement, in support of a New World Information and Communication Order (NWICO) (Vincent, Nordenstreng & Traber, 1999; Carlsson, 2003; Padovani, 2008).

It should be outlined that the relation between global women's activism and communication-centered interventions has not been a linear one: in spite of a broad recognition of the relevance of mediated messages and mediating structures to the promotion of equal opportunities for women, observers suggest that media roles and responsibilities have been the focus of only a small and sometimes marginal sector of the women's movements, and that the relation between global mobilizations and gender-aware communication activism has not yet been fully explored (Gallagher, 2010). Furthermore, it has only been with the Fourth World Conference on Women, in Beijing (1995), that “women and media” has entered the international arena as one of the major challenges to be addressed; nevertheless, it has since never gained the relevance and level of institutional engagement that other issues, such as poverty, education and health, have obtained (with the possible exception of UNESCO which, in respect of its mandate, has adopted a gender mainstreaming approach in the conduct of its activities in the areas of media pluralism, freedom of expression, ICT development towards knowledge societies).

In a similar vein, it should be noted that communication-related mobilizations have not always acknowledged nor developed adequate frameworks to include a gender dimension in their claims, framing efforts and policy proposals; while seldom international debates, conferences and official positions concerning the development of media and communication –from the NWICO in the “70s to the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) in the early 2000– have resulted in an explicit focus on the gender implications of global communications” evolution.

In articulating a framework that looks at the evolution of GoC_Gov over the past decades, it therefore seems crucial to reconsider and further interpret connections, and especially disconnections, between transnational mobilizations (in the different areas indicated above), supranational intergovernmental debates and processes (concerning both women and communication) and the specific challenges addressed by gender-oriented communication policy interventions. This should be done both looking at the substance of issues (priorities, conceptualizations of women and gender in relation to the media, new challenges emerging from technological evolution) and at the actual interplay amongst different actors (parallel paths, collaboration and competing interests, ideologies and visions). Mapping actors and issues is thus a first step in understanding contemporary features and trends of GoC_Gov.

1.2. NORMATIVE FRAMEWORKS IN GENDER-ORIENTED COMMUNICATION

GOVERNANCE

Following recent literature on the transformation of global politics, including writings focused specifically on the women's movement (Krook & True, 2010; Zwingel, 2011), it can be noted that GoC_Gov offers a meaningful case study for examining how controversial issues and claims evolve over time, sometimes consolidating into normative frameworks.

Issues and claims have been framed in different national and regional contexts, thus contributing to articulating the relation between gender and media. In some cases, these issues and claims have been translated into formal documents (e.g., codes of conduct adopted by individual media outlets operating at the national level),² adopted as specific commitments by media professional associations (as in the case of the International Federation of Journalists' Ethical Journalism Initiative),³ and translated into interventions for the adoption of binding policy documents (as the activities of the South African organization Genderlinks have proven to be rewarding).⁴ These examples show that, when inserted in policy agendas, collectively discussed and framed, controversial issues, claims and principles can translate into norms, understood as "shared expectations of standard behaviors for actors with a given identity" (Finnemore & Sikkink, 1998).

In elaborating a framework to investigate GoC_Gov, it is therefore crucial to consider if and how, starting from debates issues, normative frameworks have been structured and under what conditions that have been consolidated, eventually becoming standards of behavior for actors operating both locally and globally. A well known example of this is offered by the Beijing Plan for Action (Beijing PfA, 1995), particularly Section J,⁵ generally recognized as a milestone in affirming principles and requirements

² Over 2011, The International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) and the World Association for Christian Communication (WACC) have jointly carried out a worldwide survey as a way to map out and analyze this diverse reality. A Report is expected to be published in 2012.

³ Available at: <http://ethicaljournalisminitiative.org/en>.

⁴ Available at: <http://www.genderlinks.org.za/page/mission-and-vision>.

⁵ J.1 "Increase the participation and access of women to expression and decision-making in and through the media and new technologies of communication", and J.2 "Promote a balanced and non-stereotyped portrayal of women in the media."

pertaining to the relation between women and the media. Normative frameworks which have been adopted supra-nationally have then been referred to, at the regional and national levels, to orientate policy interventions to overcome discrimination against women, persisting stereotypes on men and women, and unequal access to media and technologies, their content and their governance. Nevertheless, in a context of fast changing information technologies and mediated environments we are confronted with open issues concerning the actual relevance of existing frameworks, their completeness and the need for revision and integration, as well as on the persisting obstacles to their implementation. Mapping existing normative frameworks and testing their completeness in relation to actors' priorities and their relevance "on the ground" is therefore a second step in making sense of GoC_Gov.

1.3 INTERACTION AMONGST DIFFERENT STAKEHOLDERS: A NETWORKED REALITY

Local, national and transnational interventions aimed at promoting a social agenda for change based on gender equity in and through any form of mediated communication involve a diverse set of actors engaged in a number of practices. Such practices might include: efforts to monitor and overcome stereotyping and disrespectful images and narratives of women in media, including making their voices heard and meaningful in the public space; fostering women's access and ability to actively participate in media and information and communication systems; realizing women's communication rights through the creation of respectful content, plural channels and inclusive processes of communication; strengthening of networking and information sharing within and amongst women's movements.

In carrying on these activities, governmental as well as non-governmental actors mobilizing for and participating in GoC_Gov, interact with each other, express different interests and preferences and play out different degrees of influence. These interactions can be carried out both formally (e.g., within formally recognized collective action platforms or in the joint publication of materials) or informally (e.g., in the form of collaboration into joint activities or through the exchange of resources and/or activists). Moreover, these interactions can be collaborative or based on conflict, as it happens when opposed vision clash.

In all these forms, the bulk of actors' interaction can be depicted as the multiplicity of networks of interdependent, but operationally autonomous actors, that produce relevant knowledge and cultural practices; develop frames that imbue public discourse and orientate policy agendas; articulate principles, norms and rules; engage in political negotiation with a view to orientate policy-relevant outcomes around issues pertaining to the nexus between women, communication and mediating technologies. More specifically, GoC_Gov can be conceived as the set of practices that promote a social agenda for change based on gender equity in and through any form of mediated communication. Such practices are conceived as the result of networked interactions between actors of different nature (governmental and non-governmental, publicly or privately oriented) and may be the outcome of cooperative as well as conflictual negotiations. Mapping networks of interaction, and investigating roles and positions of

nodes and the meaning of the linkages connecting them, is thus a third step in uncovering the realities of GoC_Gov.

1.4 MAPPING GENDER-ORIENTED COMMUNICATION GOVERNANCE

As it becomes clear, mapping gender-oriented communication as a governance domain –made of issues and interests, principles and evolving norms, actors and their interaction– is a core feature of the project *Network and Power in Gender-oriented Communication Governance* and a precondition to subsequent analyses. It should therefore be mentioned that a specific approach to “mapping” has contributed to inform the analytical framework described in the previous paragraphs; one that refers to collective scholarly efforts that have been carried on in the context of a *Mapping Global Media Policy*, an independent project initiated by the Global Media Policy Working Group of the International Association for Media and Communication Research (IAMCR).⁶

As we have discussed elsewhere (Raboy & Padovani, 2010) “mapping” is not just a matter of “listing who does what to whom” in the global environment of media and technology: it is a step towards understanding the interactions, competing interests and alternative perspectives involved in this policy domain in order to clarify where decisions come from, on which principles they are grounded, as well as the outcomes and consequences of policies, strategies and actions. Mapping, conceived as “engagement with the practical world”, thus becomes a methodology: it is about the collection and organization of data concerning specific issues as well as broader thematic areas, concerning actors’ attributes as well as their interactions, concerning specific processes or general trends, and concerning the evolution of scientific knowledge and the challenges of trans-disciplinary exchanges.

Furthermore, mapping recalls the immediateness of charts, maps and visual representations: tools through which humans have always attempted to position themselves in the world, get orientations and elaborate interpretations of events and problematic situations. Maps are therefore social constructions of the world and mapping has emerged, in the information age, as “a means to make the complex accessible, the hidden visible, the unmappable mappable” (Abrams & Hall, 2006).

On this ground, the *Mapping Global Media Policy* initiative has created a digital platform (<http://www.globalmediapolicy.net/>) which provides database architecture about individual and organizational actors, policies, documents and relevant resources that compose the field. It also includes a set of accompanying tools to produce visual representations of data: geomaps, tree maps, network maps to show the connections amongst existing profiles.

⁶ The Mapping Global Media Policy project is an independent project initiated by the Global Media Policy Working Group of the International Association for Media and Communication Research (IAMCR), hosted and supported by an academic consortium led by Media@McGill, a research and public outreach hub based at McGill University (Canada), and including University of Padova (Italy) and the Center for Media and Communication Studies (CMCS) at Central European University (Hungary). For background documents discussing the objectives, structure and scenarios of use of the Mapping Global Media Policy project see: <http://www.globalmediapolicy.net/node/201>.

The project *Networks and power in Gender-oriented Communication Governance* shares some policy-relevant objectives with the Mapping Global Media Policy initiative, while articulating them with a specific focus on the gender dimension. It aims at: fostering access to information and data on gender-relevant global media and communication governance; building and sharing knowledge on a policy domain that intersects with several others (gender, media, development, information technologies...); enhancing actors' capacity to effectively intervene in relevant policy settings and reducing barriers to meaningful participation; stimulating collaboration between scholars and stakeholders worldwide on gender-oriented communication governance.

To these ends, a "thematic island" titled Gender&Media has been created (by the GoC_Gov project) in the digital platform to gather multiple types of useful knowledge on the supranational governance of gender-oriented communication. The information collected has been organized, classified and made accessible on the Platform (<http://www.globalmediapolicy.net/island/1117>). The resulting thematic space currently includes a list of over one hundred profiles concerning individuals, such as scholars, advocates, media professionals or diplomats; organizational actors, including intergovernmental organizations, civil society-promoted campaigns and multi-stakeholder coalitions; policy documents that have been elaborated on the occasion of relevant policy processes such as Beijing and its follow ups; and resources, to include research projects, information archives or news services divided by categories. For each profile basic information are provided, including the level at which they operate, their repertoires of action, the themes and topics which are central to their activity. Furthermore, relevant policy processes are included in this "thematic island", with a synthetic description and relevant links, alongside links to all profiles in the database that share a connection to such processes. In fact, all profiles in the dataset are interconnected, on the basis, for instance, of individual affiliation to organizational structures, of organizational membership, of individual or collective authorship of documents or publications.

It should be made clear that no mapping exercise, especially when conducted on a supra-national policy domain such as GoC_Gov, can ever aim at being comprehensive and exhaustive: precisely because of the dynamic nature of governance processes, mapping as described above should become (and in some cases has actually become) an ongoing, collective effort, assumed by an interested community as a resource in support of research activities, education and training as well as policy interventions.

In the case of the project *Networks and power in Gender-oriented Communication Governance*, mapping has accompanied initial research activities and provided some insights on the general context, while the creation of visual maps (for which we provide an example in figure 1) have allowed some exploratory readings, towards more articulated analyses which will be conducted through the multi-dimensional network approach described in the next paragraph.

between gender and media can be examined from a critical perspective as illustrative of two emerging, and increasingly important, socio-political phenomena characterizing international relations: on the one hand, the construction of discourses on contested and variously framed issues that are concerns to diverse publics and constituencies; and, on the other, the development of networks where the construction of discourse takes place and supports (collaborative and/or conflictual) relations amongst political actors.

Indeed, despite the diversity of practices that constitute the field (e.g., monitoring, advocacy, platform building etc.), all dynamics deploying in the GoC_Gov domain ultimately pertain to a problematization of the gender dimension in relation to media policies. However, gender as well as media policies can be understood very differently depending on actors' frames and priorities; therefore also the nexus between the two becomes a matter of concern that can easily be interpreted in different (even contrasting) ways and, as a consequence, be translated into different (sometimes opposite) normative frameworks. If GoC_Gov depends first and foremost on how that nexus is conceived, thus making frames a crucial element in the deployment of political dynamics (Snow *et al.*, 1986), in order to gain a meaningful understanding of this domain, it becomes essential to look at how different frames and conceptualizations come together to shape a multi-actor *discourse* on the nexus between gender and media.

Discourse is understood here as "metaphorically extended from its original roots in interpersonal conversation to the social dialogue which takes place through and across societal institutions, among individuals as well as groups and... political institutions themselves" (Donati, 1992: 138). Political dynamics taking place in GoC_Gov can thus be approached with a focus on discourse construction, as an entry point to the analysis of how norms emerge and consolidate in this area. Indeed, recalling that discourses entail a set of "concepts, categories, ideas, that provide its adherents with a framework for making sense of situations, embodying judgments and fostering capabilities" (Dryzek, 2005: 1) it is then possible to study norms emergence looking at how, through discourses, issues are framed within communicative exchanges, how they are confronted and further articulated with reference to more consolidated issues and norms and, finally, at how they are put into the agenda and articulated into statements (Khagram, Riker & Sikkink, 2002).

As we have argued elsewhere (Padovani & Pavan, 2010; Padovani, Musiani & Pavan, 2010; Pavan, 2012), the possibility to understand political dynamics and norms emergence in terms of the progressive consolidation of a political discourse is a relevant feature of the governance of global communications. The non-materiality of the resources at stake (i.e., information and communication), together with the inherent technicalities connected to media issues, entail the necessity to deal at the same time with social and technical aspects converging on the same ground; a situation that enhances the complexities associated with different understandings of controversial issues and multi-stakeholder political agendas. However, information and communication issues are more and more often being shaped as social issues thanks to the progressive deployment of a discourse wherein different perspectives, priorities and political agendas converge and clash (Pavan, 2012). When it comes to connect information and communication issues with the contested concept of gender, this peculiarity of information and communication issues is further exacerbated, as it encounters the multiplicity of ideas connected to the conceptual category of gender. Hence, the

proposed understanding of discourse, and its underpinning the emergence of norms, seems to provide a suitable theoretical perspective from which to address the features of diversity, dynamics and complexity (Kooiman, 2003) that characterize GoC_Gov.

The progressive formation of what we could then label a “gender and media discourse” can be examined empirically through different approaches. In the project *Networks and Power in Gender-oriented Communication Governance* a relational perspective is adopted, considering networks not only as powerful images to depict the complexity of this domain, but as an empirical tool for investigations. Building on theoretical and analytical insights offered by the most recent literature on network arrangements in trans-national governance (Reinecke & Deng, 2001; Stone, 2004, 2008; Sorensen & Torfing, 2007, 2008; Kahler, 2009; Sikkink, 2009), GoC_Gov dynamics can be depicted in terms of networks wherein a discourse on gender and media is developed and which are shaped and, at the same time, shaping actors’ cultural practices (Mische, 2003: 258).

Adopting such a theoretical approach allows a twofold advantage. On the one hand, it favors a comprehensive mapping of policy-oriented transnational actors and interventions in a highly sensitive thematic area. In this sense, the theoretical approach also allows to examine the actual convergence of multiple constituencies in the GoC_Gov field, in due consideration of both institutional and non-institutional actors, thus accounting for structural modifications of political processes at the supra-national level in terms of constituencies enmeshment. On the other hand, it allows to overcome the shortcomings that characterize previous approaches to the study of information and communication global governance, moving from a predominant focus on the formal diversity of the actors involved to a better understanding of how different constituencies relate to one another and how such patterns of interaction evolve over time, by empirically analyzing features of networks in which different actors (governmental, epistemic communities or advocacy campaigns) are engaged beyond the nation-state.

The project *Network and Power in Gender Oriented Communication Governance* adopts a multi-dimensional framework to examine the progressive creation and evolution of a gender and media discourse (see table 1), a framework that looks at social as well as semantic networks, both in the online and the offline dimensions (Padovani & Pavan, 2011; Pavan, 2012). Semantic networks are useful to “map similarities amongst individuals’ interpretations” (Monge & Contractor, 2003: 173) while social networks help unveiling patterns of collaborative and/or conflictual interaction in the GOC_Gov field. At the same time both social and semantic networks operate and can be investigated in their offline dimension, but also online, thus including the growingly relevance of interactions mediated by electronic communication means (Padovani & Pavan, 2008, 2011; Pavan, 2012).

Table 1. Analytic framework for analyzing GoC_Gov through networks

Dimensions	Online	Offline
Social	Social networks online	Social networks offline
Semantic	Thematic networks online	Semantic networks offline

Moreover, the heuristic potential of a network approach to the study of a gender and media discourse (its constitution and evolution) is not limited to its soundness and systematic methodology: despite network representations convey an idea of interconnectedness and horizontality, it would be naïve to conceive them as deprived of unbalances or inequalities. As it happens in other policy domains, including information and communication, the fact that actors of different nature participate to the collective construction of a policy discourse does not imply that all contributions have the same importance or that they impact in the same way on the consolidation of normative sets in the area. Through a network analysis developed according to the framework illustrated above, it will then be interesting to investigate how power dynamics deploy through the interaction of actors, thus overcoming a traditional understanding of power tied to actors' attributes and fostering a more articulated idea grounded on the presence and/or the absence of connections amongst them. In this sense, it may be argued that a network approach is particularly suitable to examine the multi-dimensional forms of power in today's world politics (Barnett & Duvall, 2005; Berenskoetter & Wilson, 2007), including the politics of communication when it comes to the promotion of a social agenda for change based on gender equity.

3. CONCLUDING REMARKS

In this article we have presented and discussed the analytic framework and illustrated the methodological approach of an ongoing research project focused on the nexus between gender and media in supra-national governing arrangements –i.e., the GoC_Gov project.

We have argued that, in order to make sense of the complexities of communication governance in the global context, an analytic framework should clarify its working definitions, and articulate the nexus between issues, norms, discourses and actors' interactions. By "mapping" the field according to such a framework, it would be possible to obtain an initial and yet accurate understanding of a specific policy domain.

Although we are still in the initial phase of research activities, we can say that mapping the realities of gender-oriented communication governance has actually contributed to the gathering, organizing and making accessible a set of data which provide the initial bulk of a dynamic collection of relevant information. Not only this information collection is systematic and the byproduct of an innovative approach, but it also aims at becoming a useful point of reference towards more gender-inclusive,

gender-aware and gender-sensitive governance processes, in line with the claims and aspiration of the many individuals and organizations actors that have been active in the field over the years.

At the same time, mapping gender-oriented communication governance dynamics provide empirical facts to support and justify upcoming investigations concerning configurations of actors involved in the communication governance landscape with a specific focus on gender. On this ground, investigating networks of interaction, both social and semantic, would allow focusing on power relations in the global GoC_Gov environment. Issues of equality, participation and gender justice could thus be addressed through a grounded understanding of the different positions of actors within interaction networks, which is the precondition to elaborate on the levels of influence they are exerting on other constituencies involved within governance dynamics.

To conclude with a more concrete note, we realize that on the eve of the year 2015 an interesting opportunity is coming up. A series of international processes, all of which potentially relevant venues to address old and new challenges of the nexus between gender and media will take place: Beijing will see its 20th anniversary, the WSIS +10 assessments will be made and the attainment of the Millennium Development Goals will be tested against reality. We see the deployment of the framework described in this article, the mapping effort consolidated in the Global Media Policy Platform (GoC_Gov thematic island) and the network analyses that will be conducted in the coming months as a contribution to seizing the moment, possibly supporting the coordination of efforts that a transnational community of knowledge and practices is actively promoting towards a social agenda for change and gender equity in and through communication. 

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