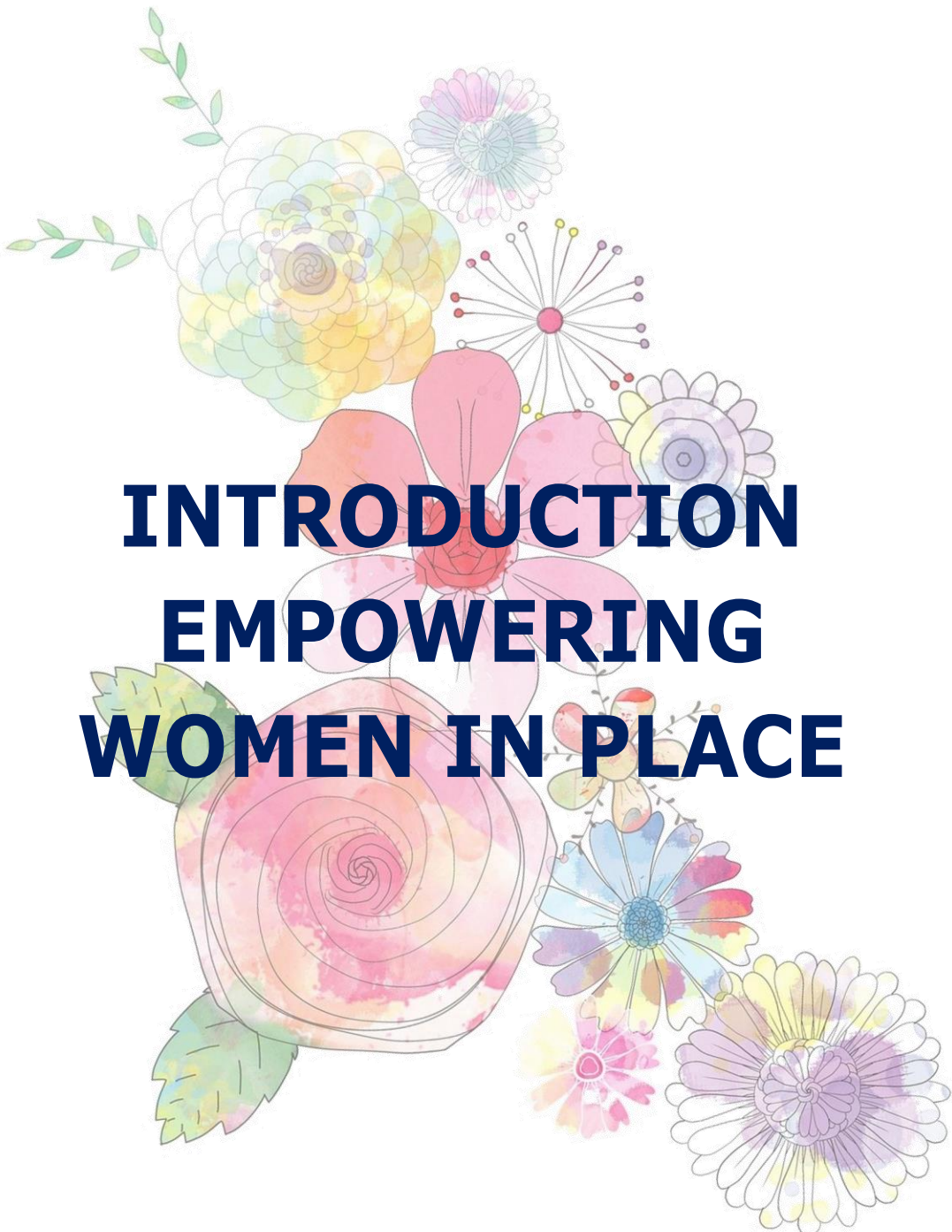


CHAPTER 1



INTRODUCTION EMPOWERING WOMEN IN PLACE

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The EQUALS-EU project, funded by the Horizon 2020 Framework Programme, represents a Consortium of 19 organisations from 15 EU Member States (MS) and Associated Countries (AC). This project, which has been developed between 2020 and 2023, benefits from the presence of two non-European Consortium members from the Global North and the Global South, offering a unique opportunity for the exchange of knowledge and good practices and the transfer of technology and innovations.

The fundamental objective of EQUALS-EU is to promote gender equality by building capacity from social innovation processes based on the action of multi-stakeholder partnerships that strengthen existing networks and formalise new ones that foster entrepreneurship among women and girls. The creation of these networks is intended to be launched as part of the process of strengthening smart, sustainable and inclusive social innovation ecosystems in local communities, both in Europe and in non-European countries in the Global North and South.

This ambitious goal, which will be detailed below, was made possible by the creation of a Consortium that combines gender equality advocates from three civil society organisations with five role models from industry and eleven interdisciplinary experts from renowned academic institutions, including the University of Valencia. The members of the EQUALS-EU Consortium were selected to represent both countries that have made significant progress in achieving gender equality, such as Switzerland and Sweden, and countries that need to accelerate progress on equality, such as Ukraine and Turkey, among others.

The above objectives are complemented by the following specific objectives:

- To develop practical activities in the form of interdisciplinary and cross-sectoral innovation camps and hackathons focusing on digital inclusion and with a special focus on sustainable gender equality practices.
- Hold high-level seminars in conjunction with existing UN and EU flagship initiatives such as the World Summit on the Information Society, the Generation Equality Forum, Women in Digital, Girls in ICT Days and the European Development Days.
- Deliver a mix of mentoring, training and lifelong learning programmes and courses, face-to-face and online, focused on entrepreneurial and professional development and organised by successful social entrepreneurs, advocates and experts, both men and women.
- Co-innovate and implement gender-sensitive business development policies and tools together with stakeholders from the public, private and civil society sectors.
- Enhance entrepreneurial competences through international academic cooperation, including the development of joint international summer schools, digital learning materials and tools that promote collaborative research, student mobility and internships.
- To inspire the next generation of women innovators by forming a new group of leaders, role models and advocates for gender equality in social innovation and entrepreneurship.
- The University of Valencia participates in this project by providing the perspective of social innovation, the analysis of the institutional ecosystem for the promotion of

gender equality in STEM and with the organisation of a summer school for 25 women entrepreneurs who will make their ideas for technology companies (social start-ups) available to investors from all over the world. The result of the EQUALS-EU project has been, among other things, the creation of a strong international network of women scientists and entrepreneurs that serves as an example and inspiration for many others, particularly in the Global South.

EQUALS-EU focuses on creating smart, sustainable and inclusive social innovation ecosystems in local communities and cities across Europe and the world by creating multi-stakeholder partnerships that bring together industry, civil society and academia to identify, develop and elevate girls and women into leadership positions in the ICT industry.

It goes beyond the expectations of the call by adopting an intersectional approach that helps advance women who experience multiple forms of disadvantage in their access to ICT, STEM and power skills and leadership positions. An intersectional approach specifically helps to address the complex forms of discrimination and disadvantage faced by younger women and girls, women with disabilities and specific needs, older women, women from low socio-economic areas, women of colour and women across the gender diversity spectrum. EQUALS-EU also uses an open and inclusive co-innovation approach to assess gender equity in social innovation ecosystems, create new ICT solutions and products and services, and generate tools for gender equity and digital inclusion (WP3). The multi-stakeholder and multidisciplinary co-innovation process also represents an innovative model of corporate governance and management that will be validated by Consortium members and anchored in local social and cultural contexts in Europe.

EQUALS-EU is based on two key concepts: gender equity and social innovation. EQUALS-EU explicitly focuses on gender equity and distinguishes it from gender equality. Gender equality is often associated with notions of equality and fairness in relation to an individual's opportunity to participate in social life. Equality often focuses on the need to eliminate discriminatory policies and practices. Gender equity is a catalyst for achieving equality and reforming power structures and relations through the recognition and elimination of historical social disadvantages affecting women and girls and the redistribution of social, economic and political resources. EQUALS-EU recognises that equity can, in certain contexts, act to reinforce gender stereotypes. However, EQUALS-EU prefers the term equity to recognise the need for differential treatment of women with disabilities and specific needs such as the provision of reasonable accommodation and the need to remove barriers to accessibility to products, services, programmes and environments.

However, EQUALS-EU is not simply a capacity-building project focusing on social innovation, but will itself produce multiple social innovations (WP2 and 3). EQUALS-EU includes a plurality of social actors and individual citizens as co-innovators and co-designers of key project activities and outcomes. This approach is a form of participatory social innovation that creates new opportunities to strategically reshape policy and practice. EQUALS-EU uses co-innovation to substantively involve grassroots actors in the creation of new ICTs and in the production and elaboration of forward-looking and sustainable policy action plans and practical business models in the form of two Gender Equality Tools for Digital Inclusion.

In this line, and with the idea of giving tools to girls and women who wish to undertake and innovate, EQUALS has launched three Summer Schools in 2023. The third of these is the one held at the University of Valencia (Spain) with the title of this book: "Empowering women in place". The

aim of this Summer School is to train students to be able to see the territory, the inhabited space, with a broader perspective, the so-called gender perspective. This is nothing more than facilitating mutual understanding and respect for all points of view, without judging some as superior to others.

This book brings together the contributions of specialists who work on different subjects and who, through their research and teaching, have helped to open minds towards new horizons in which all people, whatever their gender identity, can feel accepted, comfortable and free. In addition, all the scientific contributions collected in this book have one more common factor: the spatial or territorial perspective. Place is important; it is special in a global world such as the one we live in. The closest spaces, the city, the countryside, are the places that link us to the most immediate reality, where all people live and coexist. The territorial approach is therefore new, important and fundamental, particularly when combined with the gender perspective, in order to be aware of the world, of social relations and of the necessary shared responsibility for a more inclusive and sustainable development.

We hope that this book will be of interest to continue working for equality and respect for all people in our common planet.

Valencia, 2023