

A FEMINIST HANDBOOK FOR MUNICIPALIST ORGANISATIONS

Feministisation of Politics - FoP



CREDITS

What?

This Handbook narrates the ongoing journey of the Feministisation of Politics Collective. Through these pages you will meet some of its members, projects, achievements and the challenges ahead. Handle with care!

Who?

The Feministisation of Politics - FoP Collective is a feminist kitchen inhabited by:

Alejandra Baciero
Ana Méndez de Andés
Angela María Osorio
Antonia Komazlić
Claudia Delso
Diana Zugasti
Elisabeth Dau
Irene Zugasti
Laura Roth
Natalija Simovic
Natalija Stojmenovic
Maria Francesca de Tulio
Martina Bosak
Teresa Lorena Machado

The content has been carefully designed by Berenice Zambrano
bzambrano.com

How?

This is a collective process. As such, the result is a commons resource under a **Creative Commons license Attribution-Share Alike 4.0 International** ©

When?

This project took place between May and December 2021. It was made public in January 2022, during the n-th wave of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Where?

The discussion about the project took place in a meet.coop room, while the bodies engaged in such conversations sit somewhere between A Coruña, Aia, Barcelona, Barjac, Belgrade, Berlin, Madrid, Naples and Zagreb.

The printed version of this fanzine has been produced by Descontrol in Barcelona, February 2022.

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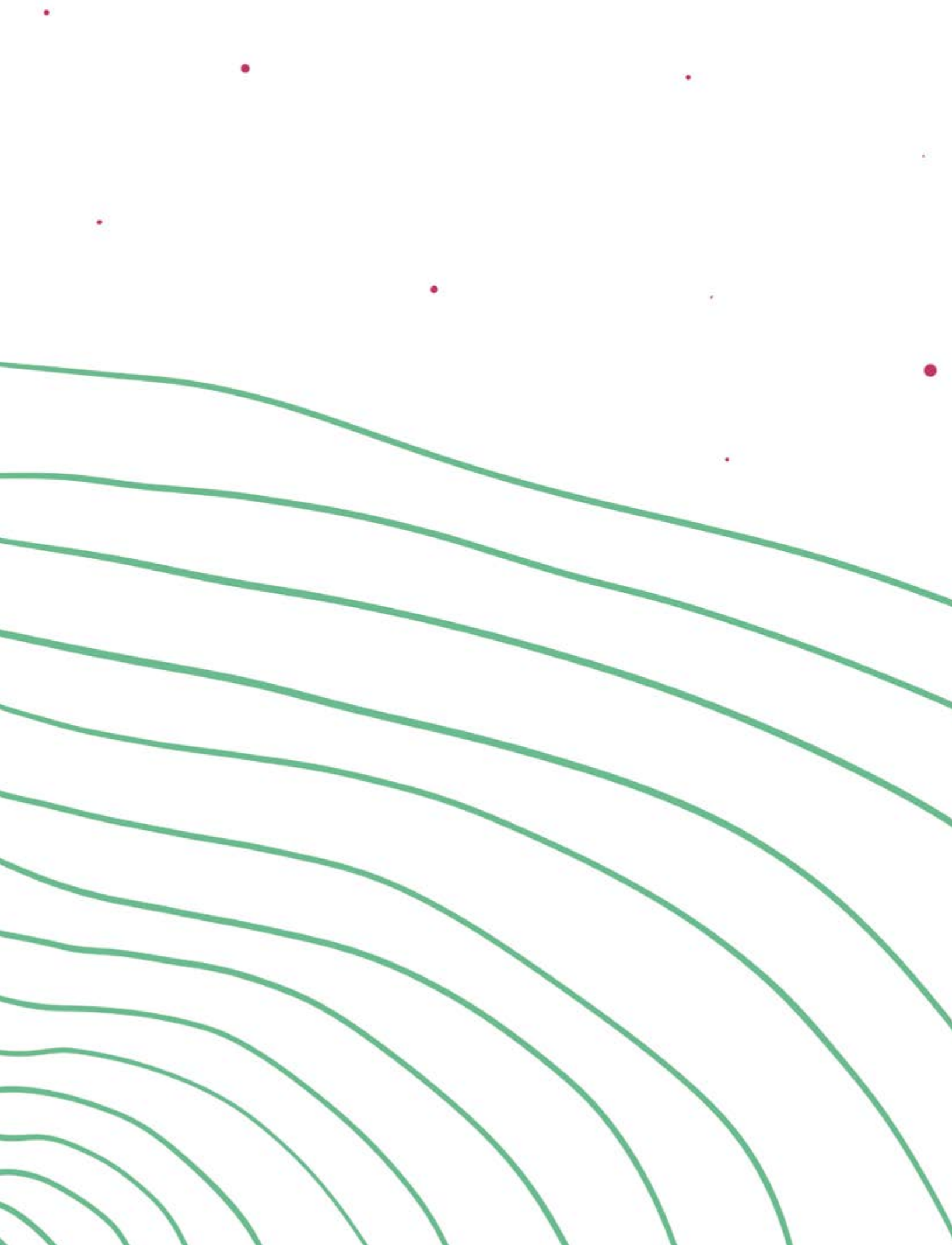
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FEMINISTISATION OF POLITICS' PRESENT
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WELCOME

Welcome to this **Feministisation of Politics (aka FoP)** project. We want to tell you about the journey of women who have created a political network across Europe -and beyond- that aims to build a response, a FEMINIST reponse, to the political situation in their towns and cities by bringing feminist practices to municipalist organisations.

We've developed different tools through this journey, produced cool materials and built spaces of debate, encounter and collective reflection. And we are still alive and kicking, so do not hesitate in contacting us!

“ We can’t conceive a transforming municipalist movement that doesn’t have feminism at its core.”

– Alejandra Baciero, Irene Zugasti, Ana Méndez de Andes, Madrid 129 (Spain).



HOW IT ALL STARTED

Remember 2015?

The Climate Agreement in Paris, the refugees fleeing from Syria, the Greek debt drama, China stock market clash...

Ah, the good old times! Us Europeans were plunged into a context of austerity measures imposed by the post-Great Recession neoliberal agenda: a context of growing inequality and lack of democracy. At the same time, far-right populism was on the rise and we faced an uncertain future where the planet's sustainability and our own lives were in danger.

But then normal, common people, pushed for a change!

A wave of municipalist platforms swept through towns, villages and major cities, seeking to challenge the situation. They created political projects involving coalitions, platforms, and social movements that run in their local elections. And some of us were part of that!

There were plenty of external challenges to face, but soon we realised that, oh, wait!, there was also a lot to do internally.

Patriarchal practices within our own structures shaped our ways of working, communicating, leading or facing collective problems. Those practices were deeply rooted, not just in power dynamics, but also in our everyday relations. Who represented the organizations? How were decisions taken? Who was in charge of caring for others? Where was power concentrated? Why do so many of us, women, feel the same discomfort?

“Competition is a masculinized social construct strongly embodied in politics. It has transcended external political processes and permeated organisations. Approaches based on exclusive leadership, accumulation of power, loyalty and uncritical fidelity have been consolidated by the patriarchal conception of power.”

– Claudia Delso, Marea Atlántica (A Coruña)

Then, in 2015, a crack commando unit (well, in fact, a few units) of women that were part of a small network of municipalist organisations across Europe started a project to put in common our experiences, the problems we were facing, our successes and failures.

And that is how it all started.

The FoP network was boosted by a group of Spanish activists who proposed other comrades from Italy, Croatia, Serbia, France and Poland to set up this project. The goal was to address, as feminists, the dynamics and transformations of municipalist organisations when one has to look face to face into institutional power structures.

We wanted to look at our experiences and think together how we would introduce - or, for some of us, rather re-introduce - feminist practices in our organisations.

Hi! We are
happy you
are here ☺

THE JOURNEY

This is not just a question of gender and class, but of multidimensional privilege and understanding power as something to compete for.

– Laura Roth, Minim Municipalist Observatory

We started by having some online meetings -thanks to our digital hackers and their ability to create safe spaces online to meet and share ;) Then, we decided to carry out a self-assessment of the feminist practices our organisations were experiencing daily.

That assessment revealed to us plenty of useful information: the diversity of situations among our structures, the common problems we were facing and the importance of putting in value all the work done so far. **A work that was too often invisible or underestimated!**

In the winter of 2019, we held a workshop in Barcelona where we finally met. How important it is to share some quality time together! We jointly analysed these experiences and defined the axes we were going to work on to produce a final report.

Cooperation

4. Proximity to



Aaaand, many methodological discussions, post-its, workshops and flipcharts later, we were able to set those axes: care, equal representation, cooperation, participation, proximity to community, empowerment, diversity, power relations, communication, structure and resources. Not bad for just a weekend together!

We brought those themes back home to work on them within our organisations and to extract the practices, methodologies, and challenges. We interviewed each other following a peer to peer system that allowed us to strengthen our ties. Imagine: Zagreb interviewing Coruña, Barcelona interviewing Serbia, Madrid interviewing Naples...

← This was fun! 😊

“ Women’s perspectives into governments, campaigns, elections and policymaking and agendas for reforms. It is not only their perspectives in terms of gender equality but also in questions like environment, economic policies, wealth fare, social protection, access to health and pensions.

– Mónica Tapia, Aúna (México)

Our first outcome was this executive report bit.ly/FOPP_ExecutiveSummary

It was not only a compilation of our experiences and methodologies but a short, direct and helpful toolkit on how to tackle those themes within organisations. For example, by establishing gender budgeting policies to redistribute resources, considering people's roles and tasks to foster cooperation, or setting spaces for care and conflict resolution.

We also recorded us and produced a video to speak about what was FoP for us.

bit.ly/FeminisationOfPolitics_Video

(cool, isn't it?)

In June 2019, we met again in Belgrade during a Fearless Cities meeting, where we presented the project and outcomes we had so far produced:

bit.ly/Feminizacija_Politike

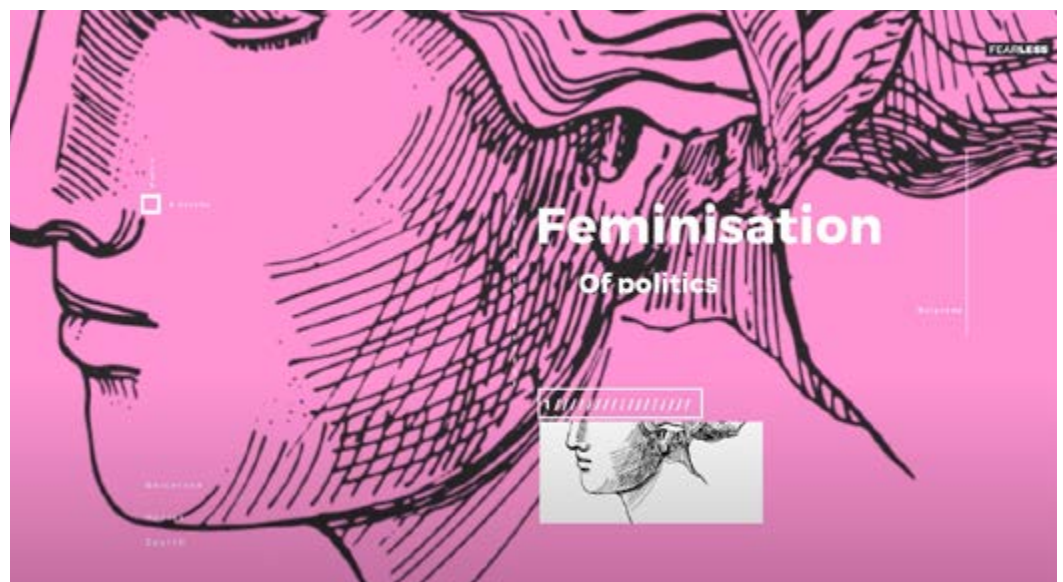
We also spent some quality time together (never forget those cevapi breakfasts!), visited our Serbian comrades' spaces and learnt about their city's struggles.

We were unstoppable!

In March 2020, the Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung offered us the opportunity to present our toolkit along with a broader political analysis that accompanied the practical toolkit.

Since then, we have had the chance to share the publication, "Feminize Politics Now!" [bit.ly/](https://bit.ly/FeminisePoliticsNow)

[FeminisePoliticsNow](https://bit.ly/FeminisePoliticsNow) with women from different European political organisations.



And then, COVID! ̸

We had exciting meetings and ideas in mind, but then the pandemic came and thus, we had to virtualise our project. However, the network continued, and thanks to digital tools and feminist hackers, FoP kept on growing.

First, we took part in the 2021 Cities for Change Forum. We organised a series of online workshops with movements, collectives and political organisations from across Europe, to explore which FoP practices they could implement in their particular contexts. As a result of this participation, we broadened our network and connected with various activists and initiatives facing similar issues at different scales in Europe. The workshop's participants received our project with enthusiasm, which reinforced our motivation to proceed with our work despite the uncertainties that COVID raised!

In fact, meeting in the virtual space with the FoP team during lockdown times was a nice break-out in our lives, even in a moment where we were all trapped in exhausting video calls. Spending time online together, connecting from our kitchens, bedrooms and offices, reminded us of the importance of mutual support and care in tough times. Thanks to that energy we persisted and the result of all the online work was a **MOOC - Massive Open Online Course** - we developed in the frame of the EMN project. This format proved to be a great way to share the experiences of amazing women, developed since the project was born.



Care



Specific sessions to map conflicts within the group



Create a pool of available, relatable facilitators



Design collectively an Organisational Care Rulebook



Specific working group or committee to take care of the physical spaces and the people that spend time in them



Crisis committees and support networks



Informal spaces for collective care – such as dinners, parties or social lunches



Create a specific agenda for conciliation, including how to plan projects, tasks and timelines



Produce a tool to collectively decide meetings schedules; set regular meetings – on the same days-hours – so people can plan and adapt their schedules



Announce meetings and events well in advance – at least one week prior/before



Create children spaces and activities, such as playing areas in public events, regular activities in the organisation headquarters



Promote the incorporation of newcomers through welcoming sessions, welcome packs with basic informations, and other “art of hosting” activities



Empowerment



Track and register organisational documentation: minutes, publications and communication rules (i.e. lexicon) to facilitation information exchange



Training on social media and digital tools



Use artistic and cultural interventions as empowerment tools



Provide neat humanised spaces: the environment matters!



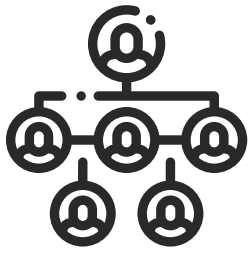
Hold technical knowledge transfer sessions



Use humour to relieve the tension



Introduce ice-breaking dynamics



Power relations



Implement tools to make power relations and dynamics visible and work on them



Learn from the contributions of feminist groups that create methodologies to identify and reverse power dynamics and to develop more horizontal and relations ways of exercising power



Organise mixed groups to reflect on privileges and how to deconstruct them



Identify when people appeal to experience in their interventions and neutralise the disempowerment effect



Socialise contacts and representativity



Make information available, so everybody shares common understandings



Design a protocol for task-sharing – especially maintenance, care and organisational tasks



Consider empowerment as a tool to review decision-making and leadership dynamics and create new ones



Discuss and design a collective protocol against harassment



Constrain decision-making to formal collective spaces



Make explicit and fact-based decisions over tasks and actions



Resources



Design a yearly feministisation strategy that defines activities, training, and needs



Participate in networks to detect common needs



Consolidate relationships, expand existing networks and pool resources and design joint projects



Seek to fund specific projects or actions that help to incorporate feminist principles



Identify how the organisation's budget affects women and men



Incorporate gender budgeting as part of the annual budget items

SHARING FOP WITH THE WORLD

The year 2021 was a great chance to gather all the lessons learnt so far and share them with the world in a format that allowed everybody to access the project and meet some of the women involved in the FoP project.

The MOOC “Feminisation of Politics: An enquiry on the feminization of municipalist organisations, structures and practices as a necessary condition for radical democracy” was the tool we used to make it possible!

And how did we produce it? By using digital tools -open source software and safe virtual spaces, free of data tracking, are a must for us!- and making sure that we included diverse voices and experiences.

This mooc was divided into four modules: an introduction and **THREE** of the axes we have been working on: **CARE, POWER** and **RESOURCES**.

Each module contains an introductory video, interviews and a good list of resources and links to continue exploring the topic, ending with a brief, not-so-serious- quiz to wrap up.

We gathered the interviews in a **PODCAST** where different voices of municipalism shared their point of view on the various topics tackled on the **MOOC**. From Naples to London, from Toronto to Belgrade, from México to Zaragoza, a delightful mixture of accents show up to narrate their experiences and opinions in this set of short interviews.

Introduction

How can we make our organisations more democratic?
How can we make our work and activism more inclusive in practice? How can we, as activists, practitioners, educators, citizens, members of different movements and organisations, ensure that we implement feminist values at work and in our everyday lives? That is the first set of introductory questions.

Municipalism + Feminism = Feministisation of politics

It seems a clear combo, but it needs some context and explanation: “New” municipalism came out as a constructive, positive and progressive movement that confronted the lack of democracy and how local governments were acting against the interest of their inhabitants.

Feminist practices from different social organisations, movements and political parties brought up different ways of understanding and *doing** feminism.

“Can care be a strong political tool?”

– Felipe González Gil, Zemos 98 (Spain).



This is not just a question of gender and class, but of multidimensional privilege and understanding power as something to compete for.

*– Laura Roth, Minim
Municipalist Observatory*



“Feminist politics” involves not only the external actions but also the internal aspects of the organisations.

The way we design policies, the decision-making processes, the way we organise ourselves, we take care of each other, and how we care for ourselves.

“We care about principles and ideas, but we all know very well that feminism is also about redistributing resources and securing practical means to claim and experiment with nonpatriarchal practices.”

– Maria Francesca de Tulio,
l'Asilo (Naples)

It is still hard to explain this idea -even internally-, but FOP project has realized the existence of common problems and the need for common and shared practices.

“Although we have grown up under the influence of feministisation principles, we are far from perfection and we have to invest a lot of efforts in observing our behaviours and practices in order to be faithful to the principles.”

– Natalija Simovic, Ne davimo
Beograd (Serbia)



Care

What is the role of care in political organisations? Which tasks do we consider as care tasks? What is the relation between care and responsibilities? Does our structure recognise care as a core value?

***“Politics is made for a single man in his 40’s and without family or much social life.*”**

– Luisa Broto, Zaragoza en Común (Spain)

In traditional political organisations, nobody cared about care. And yet, feminism raises the question of care in political organisations, and how care work should be made visible, evenly shared and considered a collective responsibility. Feminist agendas worldwide put care and the right to sustainable lives at the heart of the political debate. They embrace a holistic view of care that pays attention to people’s caregiving as well as values caring relationships, the need for psychological support, burn-out prevention, self-care and the promotion of well-being.



“Usually, these kinds of concepts are excluded or hidden from the mainstream political front line. We all depend on other people. We are all vulnerable.”

*– Felipe González Gil,
Zemos 98 (Spain).*

Care is political - not just a fancy concept- that we struggle to implement beyond the domains we naturally associate it with - that is, child or health care-, but also in political practices and activist collectives. Even in feminist organisations, care is often neglected or put apart.



“In many cases, these principles must be constantly reviewed, and this requires a lot of effort and resources.”

*– Helena García, Barcelona
en Comú (Spain)*

Moreover, the municipalist experience of many political parties that have been in power, shows that institutions produce segmentation and individualisation.

“We find many people working on their own, far from the collective spaces, and “–it’s through the collective spaces that we also build this informal network of care–”

– Ana Méndez de Andés,
Madrid 129 (Spain)

The **MOOC** materials depict different faces of care: as an attitude (*caring about*), as an action (*taking care of*), as a practice, as something everybody needs to receive, and as interdependency.



“Care is needed to achieve individual and collective emancipation.

– Iskra Krstic, Solidarnost
(Serbia)

Resources

How do we ensure to have the means to reach feminist objectives? Do our organisations map how feminist resources are distributed and redistributed? Who is deciding over these resources, and how are decision-makers made accountable? Finally, is feminism challenging the traditional ways of raising and expanding resources?

“Resources” sounds like an important thing and important things have long been a male thing. When thinking of resources from a capitalist perspective, what comes to our minds first is money. But feminists know that money is not enough -and too often our feminist projects have used very little financial resources, so we know what we are talking about! We have to consider a broader point of view from what “resources” mean for municipalist organizations, and feminists politics and practices. We all need and use resources that are not only financial (*money*) but also spatial (*physical or digital infrastructures*) or human resources (*skills, time and expertise*). There is social and institutional capital, as well, the endless resource of trusting each other, knowing your networks or who is taking care of what.

One of the interviewees in this module is Ginelle Skerritt, featured in *‘The banker ladies’*, a documentary that provides insights into the crucial role savings groups and credit associations can play in women’s lives as they provide for their families and themselves. Filmed in Toronto, the documentary introduces us to three ‘banker ladies’, Mabinty Bangura, Asha Mohamed and Ginelle Skerritt.



– Ginelle Skerritt, York Region Children’s Aid Society (Canada)

Power


How can we make power more feminist through municipalism? What empowerment means for the feministisation of politics? Does our organisation analyse how leaderships are built, what are the tools to manage conflict, or how decisions are taken?

We should talk about leadership style. It's just not women because some women might behave as a men, authoritarian and top-down approach.

– Mónica Tapia, Aúna
(México)



Power and the feminist understanding is something built collectively through cooperation, not a resource taken from others through competition. Feminising power implies sharing and creating capacity, incentivising collaboration, and abandoning confrontational discourses, even with opponents.



“The power associated with masculinity, the tasks of care, leadership, the way to build a feminist organisation and persevere in these ideals taking into account issues such as the number of women and men but also on the dynamics of participation.”

– Helena García,
Barcelona en Comú,
(Barcelona)

MOOC provides tools to exercise power differently, collecting different experiences from feminist activists and leaders worldwide and questioning the meaning and limits of feminist “empowerment”. As Monica Tapia, from Aúna, México - a platform that promotes new political representations with women’s leadership to achieve more remarkable results in welfare, justice and environmental protection - explains:

“It’s not just women, but women with an agenda of political transformations”, bringing their perspectives into governments, campaigns, elections and policymaking and agendas for reforms. It is not only their perspectives in terms of gender equality but also in questions like environment, economic policies, wealth fare, social protection, access to health and pensions.”

Alternative leadership styles linked with feminist practices include the ability: to listen to other people, pay attention to different voices, take into account experts, community and a diversity of groups - most importantly the most marginalised - when they make decisions. Because- as Mónica Tapia explains -

“We do need more women in politics, but I would say we need diverse women in politics”.

“Feminism shares leadership and shares power, and that is a principle that many young socialists today are taking seriously.

– Hilary Wainwright, Red Pepper (United Kingdom)



***And now, what?**

The Feministisation of Politics'

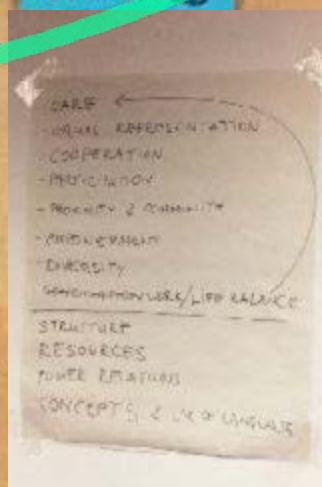
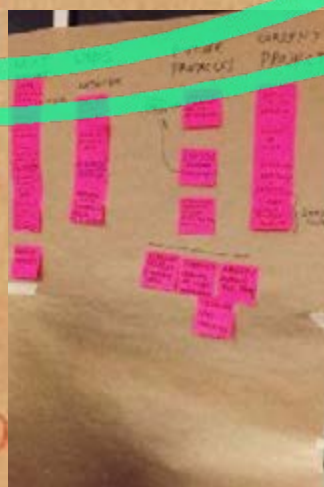
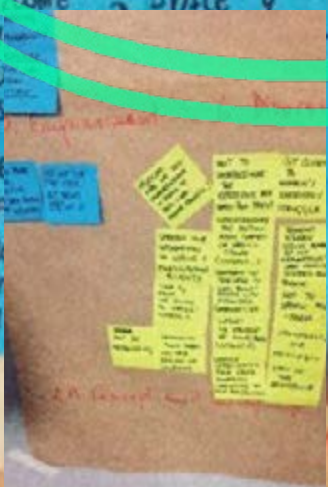
present and future

Despite pandemic times and post-pandemic consequences, FoP project is alive and growing! After our last meeting in Zagreb, in September 2021, the network has grown and is ready for new challenges.

Which challenges?

Well, long story short, we still aim to transform the institutional structures according to municipalist principles of self-government and local scale autonomy; social rights (and justice); (radical) democracy and participatory procedures; de-commodification of life.

We are planning to meet soon in different cities and continue developing the project while making this feminist network bigger and stronger together :)



ENGAGE MORE PEOPLE,

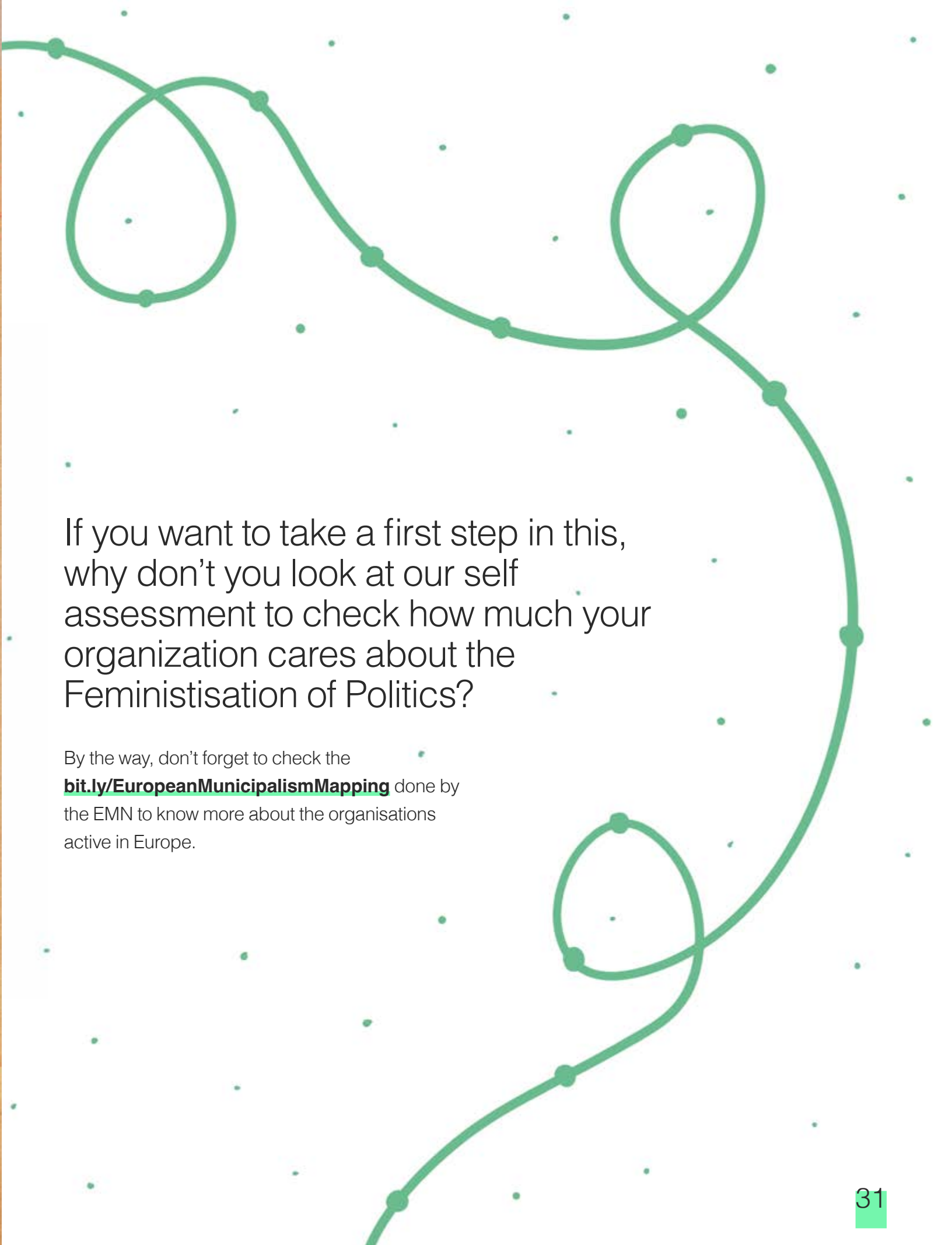
NOT JUST "USE" THE SPACE

NOT TO UNDERESTIMATE

GET CLOSER TO

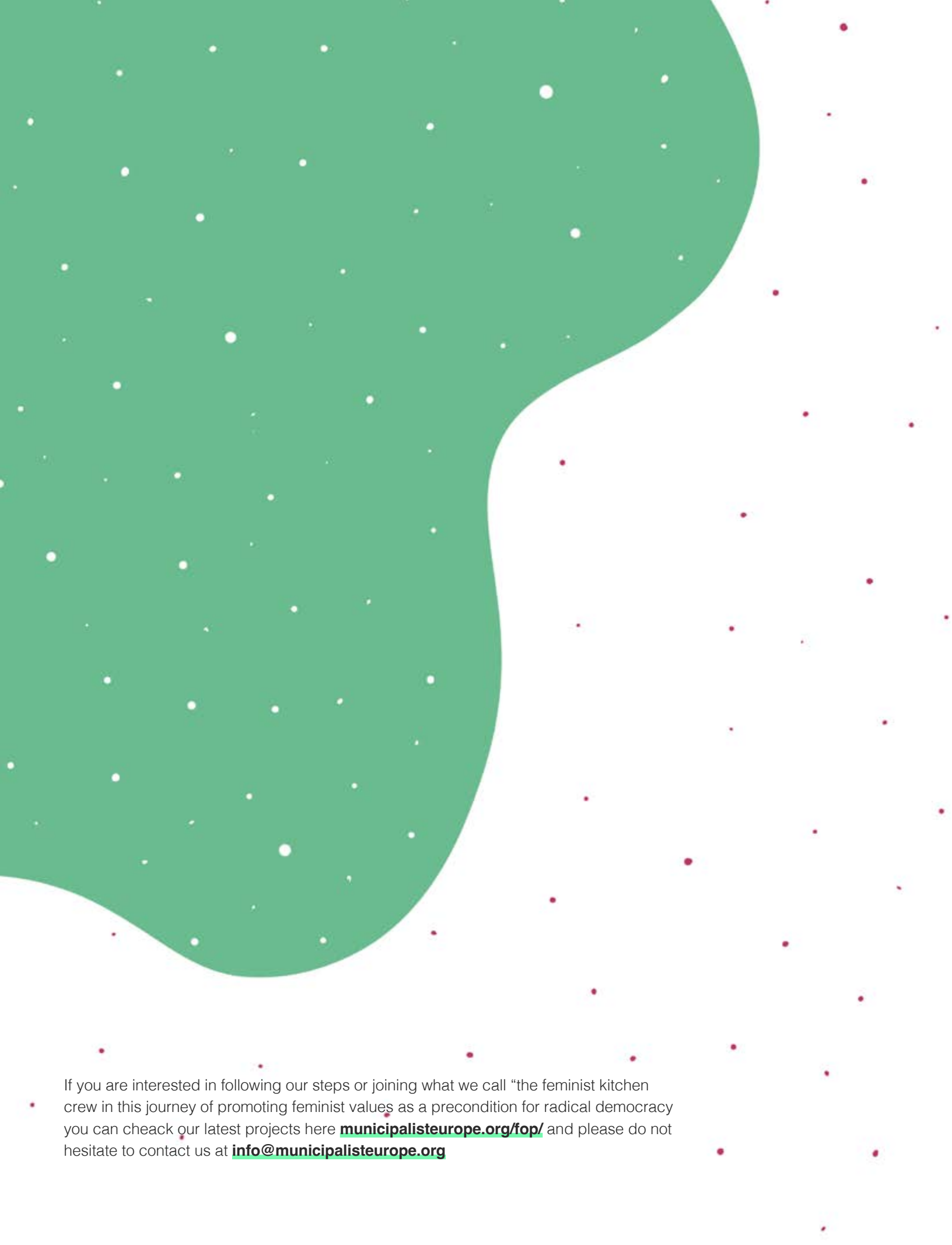
NOT TO UNDERESTIMATE

GET CLOSER TO



If you want to take a first step in this, why don't you look at our self assessment to check how much your organization cares about the Feministisation of Politics?

By the way, don't forget to check the bit.ly/EuropeanMunicipalismMapping done by the EMN to know more about the organisations active in Europe.



If you are interested in following our steps or joining what we call "the feminist kitchen crew in this journey of promoting feminist values as a precondition for radical democracy you can check our latest projects here municipalisteurope.org/fop/ and please do not hesitate to contact us at info@municipalisteurope.org