European Gender Mainstreaming: Promises and Pitfalls of Transformative Policy

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Abstract

Gender mainstreaming requires a radical redefinition of policy values and practices. This initial discussion explores the way the mainstreaming approach attempts to change the definitions of the situation so that equality in gender relations becomes an element at the point of departure. Factors that may affect whether gender mainstreaming will become an institutional innovation include the extent to which there is a commitment to a gender mission, the level of sophistication in terms of gender and policy issues in the administrative setting, the level of resistance to gender equality, and the extent to which gender experts play a role. This article investigates the role of these contextual factors as related to experiences in the European Union Commission and several states in Northern Europe.

INTRODUCTION

Gender mainstreaming is innovative, and its global spread is extraordinary. As True and Mintrom (2001) write about the spread of women’s policy machinery internationally, “This rapid diffusion of a state-level bureaucratic innovation is unprecedented in the postwar era.” Gender mainstreaming is one widely adapted approach that was developed in transnational networks and goes beyond women’s policy machinery. As a policy strategy for change, it uses the language of efficiency and the instruments of public bureaucracy, yet it demands that the vertical walls between policy sectors be broken down in favor of crosscutting governance. It requires no less than a radical redefinition of policy values and the insertion of gender equality as a fundamental goal in all policy. But what are the necessary conditions for this radical transformation to occur?

This article provides an initial discussion of the ways in which the mainstreaming approach aims to change the definitions of the situation as applied in government to include gender relations as a point of departure. It suggests factors that may affect whether the approach can become an institutional innovation that leads to gender being included in policy making as a given. The factors include the commitment to a gender

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1This article is an updated and condensed version of “Woodward 2001.” Many thanks to those who contributed to the discussion and for comments from Florence Bouvret, Monica Goldmann, Hedwig Rudolf, Hildegard Theobald, Verena Schmidt, Ilse Lenz, and Heidi Gottfried, who provided many new insights during my stay at the Ruhr University in Bochum in 2001.
mission, the level of sophistication in terms of gender/policy issues, the environmental context of resistance to gender initiatives, and the role of gender experts. It explores the role of these contextual factors as related to early experiences in the European Commission and in Northern Europe.

**WHAT IS MAINSTREAMING?**

Gender mainstreaming aims to enable the state to deliver gender-sensitive policy and transform gender relations. Its point of departure is an acknowledgement of the differences between men and women. It claims that the sources of policy injustice are found in the fact that existing structures are not gender neutral (Rees, 1998a). Mainstreaming suggests that equal opportunities for women and men should no longer be achieved solely through equal opportunity earmarked policies. A multi-stranded and total approach is necessary. The various policy-making fields should be imbued with gender awareness to incorporate equality goals into traditional policy areas (European Commission, 1996; Sensi, 1996).

Most national and international organizations trace a debt for the conceptualization of mainstreaming to the United Nations Beijing Platform for Action. Governments adopting the Beijing Platform for Action have undertaken a commitment to a strategy of mainstreaming gender perspectives throughout policy processes. The major component of the mainstreaming paragraph included in each major section of the Platform for Action is as follows:

> ... governments and other actors should promote an active and visible policy of mainstreaming a gender perspective in all policies and programs so that, before decisions are taken, analysis is made of the effects on women and men, respectively.2

Mainstreaming can be regarded as a kind of “institutional innovation” in the sense used by Nedelmann (1995) or Inhetveen (1998) for, ultimately, it is hoped that mainstreaming will lead to a virtually reflexive consideration of the impact of policy on gender relations.

To what extent is it possible to merely insert gender concerns in an organizational setting designed with man in mind? When activists move inside, in the guise of bureaucrats with a feminist agenda (femocrats), politicians, or consultants, there are necessary compromises. Heikkinen (1999) is not alone in remembering that “mainstream” in Anglo-Saxon

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2Schalkwyck and Woroniuk, 1998. The Development Assistance Committee Sourcebook of the OECD summarizes the number of paragraphs in the Platform where the mainstreaming ambition appears: 79 (education), 105 (health), 123 (violence), 141 (conflict), 164 (economic activity), 189 (power and decision making), 202 (institutional mechanisms for women’s advancement), 229 (human rights), 238 (media), 252 (management of natural resources and the environment), and 273 (children and youth).
feminist terms used to mean “malestream” or dominant culture. Thus, mainstreaming implicitly means accepting that there is a dominant culture. However, any review of the definitions of gender mainstreaming\(^3\) indicates that compromises in the language of gender have been necessitated. The further one gets from an environment that has taken gender on board through a sophisticated and broadly based recognition of the problem, the more compromises in the tools that are meant to challenge and transform gender perception. In practice, it seems that organizations adapt definitions of mainstreaming that are amenable to their institutional cultures, but these are actually sometimes far from the original UN ambitions. The amount of change seems to depend on how mainstreaming is introduced, by whom, the historical context, and the presence of opposition.

At a conference of the OECD in late 2000 (OECD 2000), the Irish Minister of Equality noted that gender mainstreaming is fraught with difficulties. It does not promise quick wins, and it requires disaggregated statistics and a commitment of resources. However, the minister realized mainstreaming’s ultimately transformative nature. It promises gains impossible with either legislative reform or affirmative action. At the same conference, demonstrating the wide misuse of the idea of mainstreaming, Heinz Fischer from Deutsche Bank claimed that business had been doing gender mainstreaming for years. Business seems to understand gender mainstreaming as simple equal opportunity in employment. It is easy to conclude with MacKay and Bilton (2000) that “There is widespread misunderstanding and confusion over the meaning of mainstreaming and related concepts . . . mainstreaming is sometimes referred to as a tool, sometimes a process or method, and sometimes a strategy.”

One of the main elements of confusion is that which exists between equal opportunity, affirmative action, and gender mainstreaming. As the OECD’s Development Assistance Committee Sourcebook explains, equal opportunity is more of a human resource approach aimed at providing equal opportunities for women and men in the workplace (Schalkwyck and Woroniuk, 1998). When the European Commission attempted to adopt mainstreaming in 1996, they needed to couple the idea to the labor market. At that time, they lacked the legal foundation of the Treaty of Amsterdam. However, the misconception that mainstreaming is simply “equal opportunity” is wide spread and can be seen in a number of the projects that are now being called “mainstreaming.” This problem is exacerbated by the fact that many European women’s policy or emancipation offices are linked to employment issues. Gender mainstreaming is different than equal opportunity and should be transformative: “a deliberate and systematic approach to integrating a gender

\(^3\)A discussion of issues in definition can be found in “Woodward 2001.”
perspective into analysis, procedures and policies” (Schalkwyck and Woroniuk, 1998).

Thus, gender mainstreaming and equal opportunity policy are complementary terms, not equivalents. Nelen and Hondeghem (2000) suggest that gender policy can be looked at using an analogy to a house. I will expand a little on their gender equality house. The gender equality house in European countries was first built as a row house, floor by floor, but well separated from its neighbors. It was a vertical policy area, inhabited solely by women. The gender equality house can be envisioned as having three floors and a foundation—closely related to the chronology of developing equal opportunities approaches. To be able to stand, it needs a solid foundation. This is the commitment of leading and powerful decision makers, who have been necessary for every stage in its construction. The first floor of the house focused on changing the legislative framework by eliminating discriminatory regulations and creating a level playing field. Rees (1999) calls this “tinkering.” This in itself did not result in equal opportunities. The second story began to redress the consequences of past discriminations through affirmative actions, as known as Rees’s “tailoring.” Both of these floors used the man as the measure of success. Women were to have opportunities equal to those available to men.

Mainstreaming indicates the thinking of a new architect who sees gender equality or inequality as a product of gendered relations and institutions and wants to totally transform the house, breaking out of the row house ghetto and changing the entire neighborhood. Initially, gender mainstreamers occupy this penthouse, but they aim to break down the retaining walls of the policy ghetto of women’s policy.

WHAT’S SO INNOVATIVE ABOUT MAINSTREAMING?

Mainstreaming can be an innovation. It is attractive to social movements for at least three reasons. First of all, it allows social issues to escape from marginal policy ghettos. It transforms the woman question from a vertical special issue to horizontal general concern. Second, mainstreaming is innovative, as it spurs the development of new policy instruments. Mainstreaming simply means doing policy with varied citizens in mind, yet as it is framed in a rational public management language, the ambitions are tested and evaluated.

4The Swedish Minister for Emancipation Policy is quoted as saying “The challenge is to move the work for equality out of the annex into the main building” at the end of 1996. (Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment, 2000)

5Rees (1999) also uses metaphor, speaking of “Tinkering” for legislative reform, “Tailoring” for women-suited remedial strategies in a woman’s policy ghetto, and “Transformation” for the third stage of mainstreaming. Mainstreaming builds on the presence of the first two stages, but goes further.
Continuous evaluation is one of the key demands of the mainstreamers, which requires new policy tools such as gender equality indicators, and gender-proofing instruments. This aspect is already materializing. By the beginning of 2002, the European Commission-funded data bank, DIGMA (Database for Instruments for Gender Mainstreaming), included more than 200 different policy instruments and approaches to doing mainstreaming. Finally, gender mainstreaming links a revolutionary goal, e.g., the end of sexual inequality, to rational public administrative tools. Mainstreaming and its implementation would denote using bureaucratic tools to gain power over the definitions of women and men.

WHAT ARE THE DANGERS OF MAINSTREAMING?

Unfortunately, there are many reasons to mistrust those who claim to be “mainstreaming.” There is substantial scope for misunderstanding, indicated in the wide variety of European approaches to mainstreaming and in attempts to eliminate special women’s policy machinery. A first problem is the term “mainstreaming” itself. It can be appropriated and given a new meaning. The further away from the femocrat center, the more frequent the misunderstanding of the term and its specific connotations. Some interpret the approach as meaning that vertical institutions for equal opportunity and women’s policy machinery will necessarily disappear.

In European policy, the issue becomes even more complicated, as all language groups are forced to adopt the English term, which leads to yet other uncontrollable currents of resistance unrelated to gender. For instance, in France, the partners carrying out the inventory for the DIGMA index ended up using the term “approche intégrée” and discovered that most social actors were still stuck with the goal of the seventies, “equal pay for equal work” and that there was a large gap in terms of information and knowledge about equality policy in general and mainstreaming in particular (Bastos, 2002).

A second issue is the fact that because gender issues have usually been the responsibility of a special women’s policy machinery in government, it is not self-evident that other policy sectors should take over gender monitoring. Some claim that gender awareness needs expertise and should be left to professionals (who are certified in Women’s Studies, for example). The instruments developed thus far promote an expert rational-technocratic approach, with separate jargon and measurement criteria.

Institutional innovation occurs best in a context where values are present that can be mobilized in service of the new institution. Inhetveen
(1998) discusses this in the context of quota regulations for women, but mainstreaming can also be seen in this framework. Not only is training necessary for the institutionalization of gender awareness in policy making, but also a high level of cultural acceptance. A procedure will only become an institution if it is taken for granted.

The strategic problem is to develop something that circumvents the personalization of gender issues by bureaucrats and makes doing a gender analysis of policy proposal as automatic as making a budget, an administrative ritual (Stark, 1998). It should be something that can be learned and carried out by the Weberian ideal typical androgynous servant of the state. However, mainstreaming gender is not quite like doing a budget in that the language of gender is still not the general language of society. A procedure not firmly based on common values will have a much more difficult job in becoming effective and in being continued.

Mainstreaming needs to be hard, and measurable, and will in this way be authoritative. The risk is that in finding the common language and routines, the transformative potential of asking the gender questions and questioning structures of power may be lost. Close analysis of national reports submitted in fulfillment of Beijing +5 suggests that administrators in sectors where gender awareness is only minimally present grasp at any straw to claim that they have already mainstreamed.

**MAINSTREAMING AS A RATIONAL AND INNOVATIVE PRACTICE**

In practice, governments attempting to bring gender into their policy process across the board through mainstreaming have used various approaches. They begin with a toolbox for doing mainstreaming—one tool or a mix, with options ranging from analysis, awareness, and training to measurement. The question is what factors have been important in leading to a watered-down approach to mainstreaming as opposed to realizing the transformative potential. Judging from early experience, as well as evidence from case studies done on the European Union (Pollack and Hafner-Burton, 2000; Braithwaite, 2001; Bretherton, 1999, 2001; Mazey, 2000, 2001; Engström, 2000), when gender issues escape the women’s policy ghetto, there is variance in the degree to which they take root in other policy areas. This is not solely due to the relative affinity or lack of clear-cut affinity to women’s issues. These authors have begun to develop predictive frameworks for the degree to which mainstreaming is taken on board by an organization. Bouvret (2001) points out that the predictive framework of Hafner-Burton and Pollack suggests that the sympathetic policy frames of, for example Directorate General (DG) for Development, would lead to great strides in mainstreaming. In fact, DG for Development has been left behind by the DG Research due to institutional factors. Much of the success of mainstreaming will depend on the
institutional and organizational setting and the methods used to carry out the project. Schalkwyck and Wornouik (1998), writing about the potential for development projects to mainstream, are among those who set out some of the critical factors for predicting success. They identify the institution’s mandate and area of work, its organizational history and culture, the current personnel, organizational routines, and procedures, and external environment and pressures. On a case-to-case basis, such variables can be evaluated within a comparative framework and can offer both predictions for success as well as handles for organizational change.

Schalkwyck and Wornouik (1998) share in many ways the perspective of the Web of Institutionalization developed by Caren Levy (1996, 1998) for Gender in Development projects. She identifies 13 interdependent elements that are considered essential for gender institutionalization, including institutional culture, political commitment, the location of gender responsibilities, political responsibilities, the dominant frame of culture, resources, procedures, and instruments, the quality of data, and the knowledge level of the staff.

An analysis of UN budgeting projects (Hannan, 2000) indicated the importance of similar factors. “Clear policy statements on gender equality and the work of the organization, clarity on gender mainstreaming in planning and budget instructions, explicit management support for gender mainstreaming, strong oversight and accountability functions, and increased dialogue between program staff, budget staff, and gender specialists” were all seen as essential for successful mainstreaming. Some of the constraints identified were not directly related to gender perspectives but concerned technical and political capacity to produce clear statements on objectives and indicators.

Combining these insights but simplifying the list of factors for the purpose of estimating the transformative potential of gender mainstreaming, the following factors can all be expected to play a role in the depth of transformation of public policy discourse and its gender sensitivity: commitment to a gender mission, the level of sophistication in terms of gender/policy issues, the environmental context of resistance to gender initiatives, and the role of gender experts. This group of factors is especially important for identifying the potential for institutional transformation, as it focuses in part on the actors and their belief cultures.

Commitment to a Gender Mission-Dedicated Actor and Historical Context

How all encompassing is the commitment to changing gender relations and how well anchored is it in the administration? Is it a policy managed

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by an ad hoc group of cabinet members corralled by the Prime Minister in a symbolic political effort, or does it come from a framework of a national commitment to equal opportunities or gender emancipation that predates the commitments made in the Beijing treaties? There can be varying degrees of consensus about the goals of a gender policy and different sorts of emphases. A particular government may emphasize economic autonomy for women, equal opportunities, or equal rights. They may have a widespread network of femocrats bearing this vision into various divisions of the public bureaucracy. On the opposite side of the continuum are the numerous governments who have isolated the woman question to a group of transitory employees in a special office. They work on policy developed by, for example, one particular minister, rather than a policy taken by the government as a whole. Accountability is a special issue going back to measurement: can managers be held accountable for their achievements and are there indicators for success in achieving a gender sensitive policy approach? A subvariable here may be the importance of a gender hero. All analysis schemes include the importance of real commitment from top figures in the organization, but case studies frequently identify one top power holder as being essential in convincing other top managers. In Nelen and Hondeghem’s (2000) metaphorical gender equality house, this commitment forms the roof, but actual examples of successful mainstreaming indicate that political and mission commitment may be the fundament, as I suggest above. Policy entrepreneurs and heroes in alliances are as important as is the degree of policy access.

Level of Gender Sophistication

How well versed are actors in the administration on gender issues? Are research, gender-sensitive data sources, and training available to develop gender expertise? Some administrations have already developed a vision about how gender inequality arises and have ideas about the tools necessary for change. They may have a gender vocabulary that is shared by people working in various fields and is anchored in a shared understanding. The establishment of specialized gender studies at advanced levels influences the availability in the public forum of sophisticated understandings of the workings of gender. An example of this situation is found in Holland where the instruments to do gender testing were anchored in a sophisticated theoretical understanding of gender relations. Aspects of policy to be examined then included issues such as an analysis of problems of organization of intimacy, the gendered division of labor, and the identification of processes of resources and gender rules (Verloo and Roggeband, 1996). This can be contrasted with the case in Flanders where the first minister of Equal Opportunities had yet to develop an analysis of the reasons for gendered inequality, and was faced with inad-
equate data on gender relations. Here, efforts to analyze the gender impacts of policy were inserted into a policy framework and state machinery with no gender vocabulary (Woodward and Meier, 1998).

**Environmental Context of Resistance to Gender Initiatives**

To what extent are there vested interests that would be opposed to the transformation of gender relations or a reallocation of resources to enhance opportunities for women? If for example, an analysis of EU science policy indicates that women are substantially underprivileged and recommends monitoring for better apportionment of resources, including new scientific terrain, this will be unpopular with those expecting a piece of the traditional scientific pie. The stronger the resistance to serious questioning of the fundamentals of gender in policy and in the administration itself, the more likely that the new questions of mainstreaming will be misinterpreted to mean that specific earmarked equal opportunities policies should be discontinued and replaced by empty motions.

**The Role of Gender Experts**

Who is given the task of carrying out mainstreaming? The Council of Europe definition indicates that “actors normally involved in policy making” (1998) should be the ones responsible. This would mean the use of in-house personnel, coming perhaps from the women’s policy machinery. Of course governments can choose between having their own personnel attempt to make previously gender-insensitive policy better or using external consultants with special gender competency. The use of an expert consultant fits in well with the technocrat approach to rational administration. Gender awareness can be marketed as a technical expertise. To be able to calculate gender effects can become a specialization much like those of consultants working on environmental effects. Furthermore, much of the rhetoric of mainstreaming is rather hermetic. It is transparent only to the initiated. As Bastos (2002) writes, the mainstream experts in France act as an aggressive avant garde as if they are running a semantic revolution. However, if the goal of mainstreaming is transformation of the perception of the average bureaucrat and institutional transformation, then external experts need to be coupled to a training and evaluation process to create learning carry over. Otherwise, the departure of the expert will mean the departure of awareness.

We see in the mainstreaming instruments and approaches thus far developed\(^8\) a range of intrusiveness and sophistication. Here is where the

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\(^8\)An in-depth review is beyond the confines of this discussion paper, but can be found in Behning and Pascual, 2001; Council of Europe, 1998, 2000; MacKay and Bilton, 2000; and Beveridge et al., 2000.
demands of policy transformation reveal contradictions. More rationally inclined bureaucracies, less infiltrated with gender awareness, will be resistant to mainstreaming in its transformative sense of empowerment, and will develop responses that are symbolic waves at gender awareness.

The question of the variation in sophistication and thoroughness becomes clearer when we look at the state of the prime European promoter of gender mainstreaming, the European Commission. Given its central role as an example, the European institutions’ experience with equal opportunities and mainstreaming has already formed the object of several studies: Pollock and Hafner-Burton, 2000; Schmidt, 2001; Bretherton, 2001; Rees, 1998b, 2000; Schunter-Kleeman, 1999, 2000; Mazey, 2000; Bouvret, 2001; and Braithwaite, 2001. A brief consideration of the case here can help us develop hypotheses to predict success of evolving programs.

MOVING FROM THEORY TO PRACTICE IN EUROPE

Mainstreaming has been discussed globally, but is an explicit goal for the countries in the EU, anchored in the Treaty of Amsterdam and supported by resolutions. The approach of the Commission is defined in “incorporating equal opportunities for women and men into all community policies and activities” (COM, 1996, 67 final 21.2.1996). This formulation has a focus on equality rather than on difference, but informal formulations after the Treaty of Amsterdam increasingly make space for a policy that recognizes difference and diversity (The European Commission’s Gender Equality Magazine, for example). Officially, the EU called for the development of methodological guidelines to build an equal opportunities dimension into all policies of the European Union (Hoskyns, 1997, 1999; Sensi, 1996, 1997). The most recent Framework strategy (2001–2005) requires that mainstreaming occur in all policy areas and is anchored in the official work program of all the departments of the Commission. Yearly monitoring of this is required.

The European Commission: A Preliminary Discussion

Commitment to a Gender Mission-Dedicated Actor and Historical Context—The European Union bases its gender mainstreaming engagement on a number of statements of formal commitment (see summary European Parliament, 1999, Resolution preamble and points A through F), and has been strengthened in the foundation of its claims by the commencement of the terms of the Treaty of Amsterdam in May 1999. A high-level group of Commissioners was appointed in 1995 to follow gender issues, which symbolizes commitment from the top to the gender mission. However, informants are critical about the engagement of the many of the members of this group. Given the recent scandal and resignation of the Santer Commission, it could perhaps be just as well that the Commission did not too whole heartedly engage itself. The European Parliament noted the lack of
knowledge about gender issues at the highest level of decision making and resolved to give this the highest priority (1999).

Formally, there is commitment to a gender mission, but informally, there is no really widespread network of femocrat policy entrepreneurs. Instead, they are located in pockets of gender awareness and commitment close to policy areas of traditional female concern (gender, development, education to some extent, and, recently, research and science policy). Many would agree with Swiebel (1999), who states that there is “for a longer time an apparently growing disorientation in which the emancipation policy at the European level has fallen. A clear vision is lacking ... what is European emancipation policy really all about?”

Level of Gender Sophistication—Nonetheless, the work of the Equal Opportunities Cell and its network of contracted academic feminists and former and present national experts is a rich and fairly sophisticated source of ideas. The very spread of the idea of mainstreaming through a variety of projects with EU support (EU local government initiative, European Structural Funds, NOW efforts, and EQUAL) is an indication that the institutions of the European Union provide a kind of a benchmark level of sophistication in gender issues for some countries. The problem is that this sophistication remains in a feminist ghetto. Furthermore, the sophistication is watered down when it comes to influencing the gender mission, which is related to the previous point. The European Parliament’s review of mainstreaming progress indicates that the parliament “is disappointed that the measures that have thus far been taken have had little visible influence on the Commission policy, with the exception of policy areas where there was already a long tradition and knowledge present on the promotion of equal opportunities for men and women” (1999). Although the experts of the Commission recommend sophisticated state of the art policy for others, their own internal testing seems very rudimentary, stopping at the question level, and never proceeding to transformation. Policy makers in the Commission are asked only two questions in the SMART instrument (Simple Method to Assess the Relevance of Policies): “Is gender relevant to your policy area” and, if so, “How do you integrate gender concerns in the policy area?” (Council of Europe, 1998).

Environmental Context of Resistance to Gender Initiatives—From all quarters (informants in EU and lobby groups such as the European Women’s Lobby in the European Parliament), there is a uniform criticism that mainstreaming and gender concerns do not touch the core areas of European Union policy and spending, such as agriculture, foreign policy, competition, environment, and transport. Although these bastions may be traditionally hard to breech, even more disturbing is the fact that despite consistent lobbying, “the great ambitions [of gender mainstreaming] do not stand up in relation to the tangible realities” (Swiebel, 1999). The big
new policy questions such as Agenda 2000 and the expansion to Eastern Europe (Bretherton, 1999, 2001) hardly mentioned the notion of women or gender, although this has been rectified to some extent with the ambitions of the new Community Strategy on Gender Equality 2001–2005 (European Commission Employment and Social Affairs, 2001b).

There is substantial resistance in the core cultures of the institutions of the European Union to allowing gender to escape from the Equal Opportunities ghetto. This is symbolized by the extremely slow movement in appointments of women to higher decision-making posts in the bureaucracy, but even more dangerously by the way that mainstreaming is being used by some forces in the institutions. The special sector of the European Social Funds for women’s employment (NOW) will, in the future, lose its earmarked “women’s money” status to see the issue mainstreamed across employment policy. The European Parliament’s own Committee on the Rights of Women narrowly escaped being disbanded at the end of the 1998 legislature, as allied men blithely claimed that with mainstreaming, they no longer had a function (Women of Europe Newsletter, May/June 1999). The multinational nature of the European Commission, as I argue elsewhere (Woodward, 1996), may also lead to strengthening of gender boundaries in the organization. It may be that the stronger masculine rationality is in a public administrative setting, the more likely that initiatives to mainstream will strand as symbolic efforts. These factors will make the success of gender mainstreaming as transformative policy innovation quite difficult in the European Union setting, despite the presence of strong voices to move forward and external pressure from lobby groups such as the European Women’s Lobby.

The Role of Gender Experts—The European Commission has made relatively limited use of experts in the implementation of mainstreaming, primarily to author a small guide for Gender Impact Assessment to be used by DG-level bureaucrats and provide specialized advice (the National experts delegated to DG V, now called Employment and Social Affairs). These experts come disproportionately from Northern Europe, and sometimes even outside of the EU. There was an expert from Norway in 1996 to 1999 with substantial experience in Norwegian gender policy. Thus, the Commission only partially follows the recommendation of the Council of Europe that it use actors normally involved in policy making. Bureaucrats who have been appointed as responsible for Equal Opportunity policy within their units are to control policy emanating from their units. However, one of the showpieces of mainstreaming, the integration of gender thinking in the European Structural Funds and the European Funds for Regional Development, was assisted by an external expert who notes that the success was primarily due to “active support in terms of financial and human resources” (Lausberg, 1999). Furthermore, the internal bureaucrats in most divisions only use about 10% of their time for gender issues.
The substantial variation in approaches to mainstreaming present in the various divisions of the European Commission can be somewhat organized using an identification of important dimensions such as the above (Pollack and Hafner-Burton, 2000; Braithwaite, 2001; Bouvret, 2001). The research on the European Union indicates that mainstreaming does not proceed apace in all areas of policy at equal speed. This suggests the need for comparative research on the inroads of mainstreaming into normal policy making cross-nationally.

The Commission plays a strong role in stimulating action in the member states. Especially important has been the explicit coupling of a requirement to demonstrate gender awareness in applications for support under the European Social Fund (European Commission, 2001), which mentions a 10% quota for gender-earmarked money—an implication of engaging in mainstreaming.

European national activity has also been stimulated by the initiatives of the Council of Europe to constitute an expert group on mainstreaming (Council of Europe, 1998). Finally, European Union countries have agreed to implement the Platform for Action resulting from the 1995 UN conference on Women in Beijing, which mandates an engagement in promoting gender equality across all policy areas for the empowerment of women. The reports from governments on progress since the Platform of Action, the Beijing +5 reports, indicate a varying level of awareness of the implications of mainstreaming (Council of Europe, 2000). Many governments seem not to have taken any concrete actions. However, moving the goal posts further may have stimulated governments to make more work of more traditional equal opportunities efforts.

To provide some indication of what insights further comparison may provide, and to explore the utility of the variables indicated above, I have grouped a few of the catalogued examples of good practice in development of instruments in projects of mainstreaming from the Council of Europe 1998 report, as well as several Belgian cases along just two dimensions suggested by the above discussion:

1) The context of gender sophistication and commitment evinced in official policy and length of experience with gender questions. This includes an evaluation of the level of commitment of power holders to seeing actual results of mainstreaming, including some measurement of financial and human capital resources invested. As a bare minimum, a policy statement from the chief executive going beyond the acceptance of the Beijing Action Platform seems necessary, but as noted above in the case of the EU up until 1999, even the creation of a government cabinet level working group is not always a reliable indicator of level of commitment.

2) The level of expertise called in to develop a mainstreaming instrument (do administrations work with their own untrained or semi-trained bureaucrats or with certified experts?)
FIGURE ONE

Gender expertise in the state and mainstream implementers: The results for complexity of mainstreaming efforts

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>IMPLEMENTORS</th>
<th>OUTSIDE EXPERTS</th>
<th>INTERNAL BUREAUCRAT</th>
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<tr>
<td>GENDER</td>
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</table>
| HIGH         | Sweden - Flying expert | Sweden-Loc...-
|              | Holland-National Gender Impact Assessment consulting | self-examination-3R |
| LOW          | Holland-Loc...- | DK-Legisla... |
|              | Gender Impact Checklist | Emancipation Effect Reporting/GIA |
|              | Flanders Gender in Balance | Flanders-Local LEER/GIA |
|              |                  | DK- Ringstead Local Evaluations |
|              |                  | EU-SMART Simple Method to Assess Relevance of Policies to Gender |

The projects included here were selected from the Council of Europe report of 1998 and were the ones where available documentation and personal interviews helped in providing background information. They crystallize the issue of the role of the gender expert from outside or inside the bureaucracy, and the issue of simplification, which holds the danger of deception rather than transformation in mainstreaming. “Gender expertise” in the figure refers to the level of gender sophistication necessary to carry out the required analysis, and the implementers are those who carry out the analysis.

High Gender Expertise Context/Expert Analyst

The “Flying Expert” was one of the approaches used by the Swedish government to carry out gender analyses in the various ministries of the Swedish national government, whereby an expert with gender competence would analyze a department in consultation with that administra-
tion to develop a comprehensive program for allowing the administration to carry out gender mainstreaming on its own (Stark, 1998).

In The Netherlands, National Gender Impact Assessment (GIA)/Emancipation Effect reporting used professional consultancies. Holland was one of the first to develop an instrument for testing policy, coupling it firmly to a sophisticated understanding of the sources and expressions of gender inequality. The GIA developed there involved a lengthy process, and the analysis has been carried out primarily on policies that are already developed, rather than during the process itself. It was necessary to have experts do the analysis from the outside in the first years of its use, and thus, it has only been done a few times (Verloo and Roggeband, 1996).

High Gender Expertise Context/Bureaucratic Implementation

Local Authority Self-Examination 3R Approach—For many years, Sweden has had, in its association of municipalities, large-scale projects on gender equality in local authorities. In connection with mainstreaming, a program called 3-R’s was launched and carried out by municipalities themselves. However, the initial focus was primarily on issues of representation in decision-making (JÄMKO website, Council of Europe, 1998).

Denmark: Legislative Review—From 1995 on, Denmark has been experimenting with evaluating national legislative proposals from a gender perspective, beginning with labor market legislation. The evaluation looks at whether the proposal promotes equality and what the consequences are for the relation between women and men. A help group from the Equality Minister provides expert advice to the actors. (Council of Europe, 1998).

Lower Gender Expertise Context/External Expert

The Netherlands: Local Gender Impact Assessment (EET; Kornalijnslijper et al., 1998)—The situation in local townships is generally much less gender sophisticated than at the Dutch national level. The Dutch national instrument was adapted for local use by external experts. The sophisticated analysis of the relational aspect of gender inequality was all but eliminated. There was a substantial reduction of the ambitions of mainstreaming limiting it primarily to improving the social position of women and increasing choices for men and women in fields where they have had fewer opportunities, thus an equal opportunities approach. Although the approach is perhaps a realistic reflection of what nontrained townships may be able to consider, it is very far from the institutional innovation implied by mainstreaming, and without substantive training effort, it may stand as a shiny external model.
Flanders: “Gender in Balance” — Outside experts were brought in to integrate gender sensibility into human resource policy in the Flemish Administration. The experts characterize the experience as one of both “roses and thorns,” with the thorns primarily to deal with the fact of the different points of departure in terms of gender understanding between the administrators and the outside experts. The project is continuing in four other divisions of the administration (Benschop and Verloo, 2000), also under the guidance of external experts.

Lower Gender Expertise Context/Bureaucratic Implementation

Flanders: Local Gender Impact Assessment (Local Emancipation Effect Report [LEER]; Vander Steene et al., 1999) — A simplified checklist was developed and was accompanied by an intensive training process organized by the League of Cities and Municipalities to enable towns to understand the instrument. Use of the LEER for analysis of policy is not required, but is available as an alternative. Although target publics were involved in development of the instrument, the training process is still on-going (Wildiers and Lobijn, 2001; Franken, 2001). The routine itself will not be sufficient to serve for transformation. Municipalities are required to file reports on gender equality with the federal government, but there is no information available on compliance.

Flanders: Emancipation Effect Reporting (GIA; Woodward and Meier, 1997, 1998) — This instrument was developed by academic experts as a variation on the Dutch National instrument, and was tested on policy intention plans to demonstrate their level of gender sensitivity. The intention was to develop an instrument that could be applied early in the policy process and could lead to policy changes to limit negative effects on gender relations. The administration feels that the “instrument is too theoretical, and there was a lack of an implementation plan and the necessary political will to gain wide acceptance.” Again, the instrument will be further simplified, which on the one hand may allow normal policy actors to carry it out, but will necessarily, on the other hand, be coupled to a loss in sophistication and ability to identify more complex aspects of gender inequality.

Denmark: Local Authorities — Ringstead in Denmark was one of the experimental projects sponsored by the Nordic Council of ministers in their pilot projects to spread mainstreaming in the Nordic countries. In this project supported by the Nordic Council of Ministers, Denmark attempted, in a local municipality, to achieve greater gender balance in segregated jobs, which is more of an equal opportunities project than a mainstreaming project. The experience in the municipality with the need for a longer time frame to do transformation of expectations led to the decision to implement mainstreaming within national government using
pilot projects in only a few ministries rather than attempting to main-
stream across the board (OECD mainstream web site, speech by Jytte
Anderssen, Danish Minister of Gender Equality, November 24, 2000,
OECD Conference in November, 2000).

European Commission: SMART Initiative—Given that the level of gender
awareness and competence varies dramatically, a commission was given
to an outside expert to develop a check list for seeing whether policies
needed to be gender proofed or not. The SMART instrument is undoubt-
edly one of the simplest developed, but it also characterizes the enormous
distance between the ambitions of mainstreaming and what organizations
may make of it. It consists of two questions: Is the policy proposal directed
at one or more target groups? Are there differences between women and
men in the field of the policy proposal (with regard to rights, resources,
positions, representation, values, and norms) Council of Europe, 1998)?

DISCUSSION

It is too early to conclude much about the final impact of these efforts.
New efforts and instruments are being developed constantly in Europe.
Perhaps most importantly, there is substantial work being done on the
“basement floor” of the gender equality house, as many governments
took stock after Beijing +5 and filed national action plans for main-
streaming, e.g., the Netherlands Interdepartmental Plan of Action on
Gender Mainstreaming 1999–2002 and Ministry of Social Affairs and
Employment Department for the Coordination of Emancipation Policy,
2000.

Generally, the most sophisticated, tailor-made, and time-consuming
approaches involve the use of certified gender expertise and a detailed
analysis of the policy process, as exemplified by national efforts in
Sweden and The Netherlands. These countries can be said to be in the rel-
atively luxurious situation of knowing what gender mainstreaming is,
having sufficient gender data and having developed a broad concept of
gender equality (TECENA, 2000; Outshoorn, 1995, 1997). Yet they suffer
from their very excellence, as they challenge policy makers with trans-
formative issues. The costs of mainstreaming with this approach are quite
substantial and will remain high until gender is taken to be a matter of
course. It is probably not random that this approach was chosen by two
countries with substantial sophistication in gender equality. However,
even with relative sophistication, mainstreaming can be difficult. Sym-
tomatic of this is that the Nordic Council of Ministers launched its efforts
in mainstreaming with pilot projects in two areas clearly related to gender,
the labor market and youth policies. Yet even in these policy areas, which
share frames that should be sympathetic to gender, many projects never
get further than the level focusing on women’s representation and other
equal opportunity issues (OECD, 2000; Main Messages).
It was difficult to find cases fitting in the second cell, which could be characterized as the ideal situation envisioned by mainstreamers in which the entire context is highly gender sensitive and bureaucrats are able to carry out mainstreaming. Swedish municipalities, through their central organization and through more than a decade of project competitions, are working in a highly gender-sensitive context, and thus, their project seems to have transformative potential over the long term. The Danes will rely on the expertise developed in the equality policy ghetto to begin to transform the mindsets of civil servants in other policy areas, and this may be a method of reaching transformation as well.

The fundamental commitment to improvement in gender relations is extremely important. The cases in less gender-committed settings carried out by external experts are the most vulnerable to the disappearing act. This is the case for both the Flemish personnel administration effort and the Checklist for Dutch local authorities, where shared ownership of the project between the bureaucrats and the experts is more unclear. Only with continued resources and commitment from top agents can one expect real improvement beyond cosmetics in such cases.

In the fourth cell are the efforts carried out by in-house bureaucrats in relatively low gender-aware environments, as in Flanders, the local example from Denmark, and the first European Commission Smart instrument. Although all of these projects recommend continual training and awareness development, the instruments themselves are less intrusive. They involve a watchdog approach and can be carried out by civil servants with a low level of gender expertise. Both the broader European Commission and the Flemish case can be characterized as settings that are relatively resistant to gender equality issues. This can be seen in, for example, the gender segregation of top level staffing, and the late adoption of gender equality statements. For different reasons, neither setting has a high degree of gender expertise present among its own staff members. Gender expertise is present primarily among employees of the gender equality machinery and specially recruited experts. There is relatively high mobility among staff in the European Commission, as promotion often entails transfer to another unit. Thus, for example, in DG Development, staff members responsible for mainstreaming have been replaced frequently, and long vacancies have hamstrung progress, despite the presence of good gender impact instruments (Bouvret, 2001; Braithwaite, 2001).

For all of these settings, it is essential that gender mainstreamers find a niche in the policy process that is routine and coupled with resources. Otherwise, the risk is great that policy makers will talk about gender mainstreaming but not do it. In the ideal mainstreaming world, the fourth cell of the table will gradually become empty, as more sophisticated instruments are learned by bureaucrats who have become gender aware in the process of mainstreaming. Nonetheless, even the weaker instruments of Flanders or Ringstead, Denmark or the local
checklists to be used in Holland have a great potential. By requiring their application, and thereby requiring that policy makers learn how to use them, gender tools become part of an institutional learning process. The necessity is to design an adaptable system that will keep doing gender even as different political winds blow. In some ways, the simple model may be a better strategy than susceptible one-off reform packages with expensive external experts. The challenge is to expand this analysis using one or a combination of the predictive schemes identifying critical success factors that have thus far been developed to carry out comparative research of mainstreaming efforts, successes, and failures within different sorts of institutions at the international, national, regional, and local levels.

However, the “time when we don’t need to speak this language because the languages will have changed” is going to be a long way off. Policy tools can perhaps speed up learning, and this is what mainstreaming is potentially well placed to do. It is to be hoped that it will not entirely adapt the language of power, but will retain a strong accent of its own. In any critical understanding of the mainstreaming approach, the symbolic use of politics should not be ignored (Edelman, 1968; Harrop, 1992). In its first applications where external experts are called in to do showy projects, the risk is that it remains only a show, and that mainstreaming may not lead to a dramatically more sensitive policy process that no longer precedes from male as the norm. Yet by moving beyond the walls of State Feminism, mainstreaming efforts may create an “aha” effect in unsuspected quarters, and may serve as a mode of public learning.

The question posed was whether mainstreaming offered a promise or only pitfalls for women in European policy. The answer is a little of both, as mainstreaming is now being talked about and applied at all levels of government, with widely varying approaches. That women may disappear in the policy pit remains a risk thanks to blurring of affirmative action and equal opportunities with mainstreaming. However, gender mainstreaming and equal opportunity are not unrelated. As the OECD emphasizes,

Greater equality between women and men can only be based on an understanding of their relative roles and needs as revealed through gender analysis. Conversely, enhancing the role of women through equal opportunity is helpful to implementing gender mainstreaming. But affirmative action alone does not necessarily build the capacities, systems and institutions needed to fully achieve the implementation and promise of gender mainstreaming. (Definitions-OECD website: http://www.oecd.org/subject/gender_mainstreaming/about/).

By agreeing to the terms of the Beijing Platform for Action (UN, 1995), governments have taken on an obligation to do something. It is to be hoped that the goals set by the international forum will lead to more than simply symbolic actions. The case of mainstreaming is a demonstration
of how gender issues can spur creativity and can potentially transform policymaking.

CONCLUSION

Mainstreaming began initially by speaking the language of modern management, which is result driven, requiring instrumental and rational measurement. This may ultimately bring about a heightened ability for policymakers to deal with the cross-cutting problems of inequality that breach rational models. However, the mission to mainstream gender concerns into all areas of policy will ultimately require a fundamental commitment from those in power. Settings where political groups hope to reverse the progress of equality can use mainstreaming in dangerous ways, dismantling women’s policy machinery and committing no resources in their place. Public organizations are, “at root,” political. Without a consideration of power relationships, the transformative potential of mainstreaming will come to naught. Speaking “truth” to power, as Wildavsky (1979) taught, requires using the language, but also recognizing that power is there.

Gender mainstreaming has the potential to permanently transform the language and images of policy making to become more inclusive and sensitive to diversity beginning with sex. Reaching this place ironically requires a strategic usage of the practices and existing language of politics and government, including building alliances to create contexts where gender awareness is a given and equality is a constant goal.

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