
GENDER MAINSTREAMING AND THE WOMEN'S MOVEMENT

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In this paper I describe the controversy about Gender Mainstreaming (GM) in Germany. I will discuss the implications GM has for the relationship between the women's movement and the state.

Afterwards I am interested to hear your points of view and to learn about discussions on Gender Mainstreaming in other countries.

Before speaking about GM in Germany as it presently exists, I would like to give a brief introduction on the organisational structure of the German women's movement and the German federal administration. This is to give a picture of the parts of state and society that are most relevant in the context of implementing GM. This background information will help to understand the controversy around GM and show how the different opinions on GM have evolved. I will suggest that considering what a person has to gain or lose is crucial to understand her or his attitude towards GM. Finally, I will have a look at the chances and risks GM brings to differently positioned persons. This is also to hint at problems of exclusion inherent to the concept of GM and to new opportunities of policy access.

I will use the term "women's movement" for all groups, organisations and individuals who strive for women's rights, emancipation and gender equity, regardless of which particular stream of the women's movement they identify themselves. This can also include feminist party politicians and women in other institutions. Although the term "feminist" is controversial, I will use it here to describe an attitude that is advocating for women and interested in a change in gender hierarchies in favour of women.

Women's movement:

In speaking about the new women's movement in Germany, I will be referring to West-Germany, as there was no women's movement as such in the state socialist GDR. Women's organisations in the GDR were governmental and not feminist in their attitude.

The new women's movement in West Germany since the 1970s consisted of a vast variety of loose groups. Large, formal feminist organisations never existed in Germany. But the women's movement built up a dense infrastructure (bookstores, cafés, magazines, clubs, publishers, ...) with different emphasis, aims and services for women. It developed independently from the traditional women's rights organisations stemming from the turn of the century, which had disappeared or were heavily weakened because of the Nazi politics of systematic expulsion of women from the public sphere. The West-German second wave women's movement was strongly anti-etatistic and autonomous. This was due to the fact that it thrived as one of the leftist protest movements determined to come to terms with the Nazi past: Science, professional lobbies, industry and other civil groups had been strongly involved in the Nazi politics and some high ranking posts still continued to be occupied by former Nazis after the war (see e.g. Wiesenthal 1988). The left movements criticised this relationship between state and civil society and distanced themselves from institutionalised politics. For the left youth, everyone in their parents' and grandparents' generation was a potential Nazi or at least a "Mitläufer", a non-objecting bystander. Feminists, moreover, saw the state and its political institutions as part of the patriarchal oppression.

Only with time did the new women's movement begin to make use of the state as a source of financial aid for women's projects. These shifting attitudes toward the state can also be traced in the political science discussion of the effects of the welfare state on women's positions. (see e.g. Orloff 1996, Walby 1990) Since the 80s the confrontation between institutionalised politics and feminist organisations relaxed, and feminist groups of different ideological streams started to work together. Traditional women's organisations and women in parties, unions and other civil organisations were new partners for the autonomous women's groups. The women's movement diversified and professionalised. Over time, feminists as well as their ideas began to infiltrate the state and governmental structures for women's issues were implemented. The "march through the institutions" proclaimed by the students' movement of the late 1960s was joined by the women's movement.

German administration

The German administration is dominated by jurists, academics with a judicial background: a high percentage of public employees are jurists. Employees of ministries are lifelong employed civil servants. Only the highest ranking positions in ministries are politically appointed for the time of one government. Politics are legalistic and a matter of steering by rules and regulations. Because of the federal structure of Germany the federal ministries play an important role in the policy process: A majority of law propositions is presented to the parliament by the government, which means that they are worked out in the ministries. In other countries it is the parliament proposing laws.

As on the federal level, there is no unit to coordinate and unite the ministries' activities the results are particularistic departmental policies. Cooperation is taking place mostly as "negative coordination" which means that ministries comment on other ministries' policy initiatives as far as they themselves are affected. Policy initiatives are incremental: very detailed, fragmented and with limited scope. Political consensus and enforceability are relevant factors for policy initiatives. (Mayntz 1997)

The governments of all levels (federal, state, community) are engaged to different degrees in efforts to reform the administration for more service orientation and efficiency. But as the state budgets are shrinking dramatically rationalization has become the most central among the different goals.

Since the beginning of the 80s the states (Länder) and communities (Gemeinden) in Germany started to implement "women's policy machineries", state institutions to address the issues of women's rights and emancipation. These were "Frauenbeauftragte", women's representatives, who worked towards gender equality in the local and state governments and distributed financial support for women's projects. In some states they were installed at ministerial level. On federal level, a minister became responsible for women's policies since the mid 80s.

Depending on the minister, the emphasis was placed to varying degrees on either emancipatory goals or the constitutional duty to protect the family. All machineries independently of their feminist aims are "affected (...) by the deep division in the political culture over the role of women in family and at work." (Stetson 1995, p. 283) With the implementation of women's policy machineries like the Frauenbeauftragte at the state level or the women's ministry at the federal level, women advocating emancipatory goals or even explicit feminists gained access into the administration, where they worked to "sensitise other government departments to the women's dimensions of their mission" and "to keep affirmative action on the political agenda" (Ferree 1995, p. 103, p. 111).

Policy access for women's movement organisations

The women's policy machineries opened up new channels into politics for the women's movement in addition to the institutionalised ways through parties or unions. Nevertheless the impact of the women's movement has always been limited. The policy research of associations and corporatism has different explanations for that:

- First of all, women's issues are diverse in topic and characterised by their cross sectoral relevance. This does not respond to the shape of the political and administrative institutions. One obvious example is prostitution, which has aspects of justice, of public safety and of health.
- The women's movement groups have a low level of formal organisation. Even if they have formal structures, they are beset with low membership. This creates problems of representation and legitimacy in a representative democracy.
- The federal system requires organisational representation at all levels of the political system (federal, state, communities) so that corresponding levels of societal and governmental organisations can interact. Few women's organisation have such a structure.
- Institutionalised politics and bargaining do require certain interaction mechanisms and the exchange of goods, that women's organisation have not yet offered. This includes the possibility of obstruction (as for example the unions have), information that is considered relevant (as for example professional associations provide), and stable actor networks (as lobby groups consist off). (Biegler 2000)

Gender Mainstreaming in Germany

It is no coincidence that only after the government changed in 1998 to a social-democratic/green coalition after 16 years of conservative-liberal government the work on implementing GM had started. One of the legal acts referred to for this is the sentence that was added to the constitution after the unification of the two Germanies. It says that the state has to actively promote gender equality. On a federal level, pilot projects have been worked out in all ministries to try out how GM could function. One of the aims is to develop instruments which will support the civil servants to implement the perspective of gender equality in their daily work. In the next phase these instruments are to be tested and optimised. Sensitising, training and consultation are part of the concept.

It seems as if the state now organises the gender equality agenda partly on its own. It no longer relies on civil society to place topics on the political agenda, but it is focusing on the inefficient compliance of the given legal and political demands in its realm. Bottom-up pressure from a movement - although it might be welcome - seems not to be the necessary mechanism for moving political change forward. Rather the administration relies on its own means. GM can be interpreted as the result of an ongoing diversification and professionalisation of the women's movement which improved its strategies in different activity areas. This is an evolution which other social movements, as for example the environmental movement, have also gone through.

The political actors introducing GM into organisations and administrations are so-called femocrats: feminist women who have positions in the state or other institutions and who strive for women's rights and emancipation from and within their realm. They found their place in official institutions when states, pressured by the women's movement, began to implement structures for women's emancipatory policies. From a policy analysis perspective, this major policy change, which has taken place in almost all western European countries since the late 1970s, is the success of an "advocacy coalition" of actors in different policy subsystems like state institutions, parties, and grassroots groups. The advocates share convictions or "core beliefs" that enable them to commonly achieve political changes, even if their goals might not be identical and even if other advocacy coalitions dilute their original aims.

While the positioning of femocrats in institutions and the setting of feminist topics on the political agenda was heavily dependant on bottom-up pressure and input, Gender Mainstreaming as a strategy to achieve gender equality is implemented from within the state and does not ally itself with grassroots organisations. Femocrats developed strategies that fit into their professional environment: into the discourse of modern administration and the logic of political bargaining. This was necessary since up to now incentives for gender equality did not achieve satisfactory results: Marginalisation of women

and women's interests had been successful, but partly also because strategies were not conforming to the powerplays and the logic of institutionalised politics and administration.

GM is designed as an administrative reform project that, as such, will also have an impact on the distribution of money and subsidies. Feminist structures and organisations will be affected thus. This is one main reason why the discussion on GM is so vivid.

The discussion on Gender Mainstreaming in Germany

Since the EU has started to implement GM into its policies, the federal, state and local governments work on it in Germany. With this development, a controversial discussion on GM has started within the women's movement.

The discussion seems to open up old frictions within the women's movement concerning questions of cooptation and adaptation and how to cooperate with the state. But parts of the women's movement have already infiltrated institutions and some earn their money from cooperation with the state. So the discussion is not the same as in former times.

It is not at all unequivocal what GM means, where it is understood to come from and what its aims supposedly are. Even descriptive literature about GM does not give a convergent definition.

I will summarise the range of interpretations of GM:

- GM is described as coming from the feminist lobbying of women in international organisations. Or it is described as coming from the US-American business administration strategy "managing diversity". These different interpretations mean that GM is understood either as part of the development and successes of the women's movement or as coming from a background that has nothing to do with women's rights and thus breaks with feminist tradition.
- GM is seen as a subversive strategy, as a "Trojan horse" that will revolutionise silently the state; or it is seen as a tenacious but promising reform strategy of small steps; or as a neo-liberal project to cooptate and neutralise women's advocacy incentives.
- GM is seen as an analytical and differentiating instrument to direct attention towards a wide range of differences apart from gender; or that it will address gender difference going beyond binary concepts; or it is seen as instrument to show differences between women and man "as such". Some also see it as an instrument that will reinforce stereotyping and sexist preconceptions.
- GM is seen as evolution of older feminist instruments that optimise the strategic weaknesses and gets to the core of power by top down approach and by involving men. Others interpret it as negation of the feminist insight that personal experience is indispensable for political advocacy and understanding.
- GM is seen as a strategy to finally achieve gender equity and therefore needs the support and action of feminists; and It is also perceived as a concept, the practice of which will lead to the abolishment of feminist projects and the replacement of traditional advocacy women's policies.

If different attitudes towards GM are seen in the light of the opportunity structures GM gives or promises, it can partly be made comprehensible how the discussion comes about. It is not so interesting to be able to provide a definition of what GM is or does, but rather to look at what can be gained or lost through GM and who will gain and lose as a result of GM.

Relevant factors that influence the attitude towards GM seem to be:

- epistemological standpoints:
modern or post-modern concepts of gender and the assessment of the usability of the concepts for political strategies
- the position towards the feminist movement:
to identify oneself or sympathise with the second wave women's movement and its critique of power and sexism or not
- the position in the movement :
to be sceptical towards state institutions or to take a more liberal feminist attitude confiding in the state, justice and reforms

- the degree of dependence on subsidies or money from the government:

being dependent on financial subsidies and as such being less or more vulnerable to spending cut downs and neo-liberal developments - as for example grassroots projects, feminist research project in and outside the university

- access to policy networks:

being part of policy networks, formal or informal, and thus have contact to administrative and political actors or be in an "outsider" position; one aspect here is the exchange of goods at one's disposal which can be offered for entrance into the networks, like e.g. information.

- the cooperation with and experiences made with the state:

staying autonomous like working in grassroots projects, non-hierarchical organisations or adhering institutional strategies like working for, with or in state institutions

The opponents of or the scepticists towards GM stress the exclusions GM produces and suspect it to be harmful to feminist goals because it imposes a hegemonic concept of gender equity. They claim that the concept of GM must be discussed thoroughly and that it is not enough to start only from the pragmatic constraint that GM is already there. To follow the rules of political diplomacy is seen as compromise and as a betrayal of feminist goals. From this point of view, women embracing GM will seem naive, opportunistic or as assistants to neo-liberal reorganisation.

Such an oppositional stance is often taken up by feminist academics of gender theory, philosophy or other humanistic departments. GM does not offer them the perspective to gain ground in the political play as their expertise and research does not answer the emerging needs of the administration. So their point of view is concerned less with the opportunities and professional benefits an increased interest of the state in gender studies might bring. Instead, they fear to be affected by exclusions produced by decisions based on GM.

Another fundamental critique is brought by persons on the far-left. They wonder why GM is being pushed right now: when neo-liberal reforms threaten to dismantle the welfare state.

The sceptical attitude of some feminist grassroots organisations seems to be motivated by past experience of cooperation with governmental structures. Financially supported by the authorities, they have to always justify the gender separatist concept. Changes of prerequisites for funding is thus invoking severe caution. Their experiences as petitioners might bar the way to envision possible new forms of cooperation through GM. If it is true that knowledge is one of the primary goods that lobby groups have to offer for political influence, GM might open up new professional and political opportunities for activists from diverse fields. As the administration's need for expertise is that of concrete, applicable, functional experience in different policy fields, feminist activists' experience and knowledge about concrete consequences of administrative decisions might become appreciated.

The advocates of GM stress the opportunities GM can open up for feminist goals and policy access for women's activists. These advocates want to explore the most viable strategies to successfully implement GM and contribute their knowledge as experts and consultants. Therefore, they are willing to play by the rules of administration and official politics, at least to a certain extent. This also includes rhetoric strategies. The increased avoidance of the word "feminist" is one example. Opponents of GM appear as fundamentalist, old-fashioned, maybe old-fashioned-leftist in the eyes of GM advocates.

Advocates of GM are to be found among academics from faculties which deal with politics or governmental issues such as political science, law, business administration. In addition, researchers and consultants with gender expertise are taking sides with GM. These groups seem to expect professional opportunities for themselves and see a growing demand as governmental institutions and organisations need specific expertise.

The evolution of strategies of parts of the women's movements, such as the femocrats who work on the reformation of state structures, can be seen as a professionalisation: They have taken up the logic and rules of their working environment, and have started to use them to pursue their feminist goals. The implementation of GM can be seen as one result of such professionalisation. But also other women became more professional by developing expertise in gender issues for research, consultation,

or through field work on grassroots level. How different parts of the women's movement will get involved and how they envision their political and professional opportunities through GM is crucial for the further diversification and the strategies of these parts of the women's movement. GM will fundamentally and in many ways affect the interaction between the women's movement and the state.

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