Localizing EU Gender Policy:
The Diffusion of Gender Mainstreaming across Feminist Movements in Eastern Germany*

by

Katja M. Guenther
Visiting Scholar, Minda de Gunzburg Center for European Studies
Harvard University, 27 Kirkland Street at Cabot Way, #416
Cambridge, MA 02138
617.495.4303 x238; kguenth@fas.harvard.edu

Beginning July 1, 2008:
Assistant Professor, Department of Sociology
University of California, Riverside
1206 Watkins Hall, Riverside, CA 92521

Abstract

Gender mainstreaming emerged in the mid-1990s as an innovative and controversial policy tool for reducing gender inequalities. The European Union seeks to propagate the practice of gender mainstreaming both within EU institutions and among member states. Feminist scholars and policy elites discuss and debate gender mainstreaming widely, but have yet to consider how local feminist activists, who could play a central role in diffusing gender mainstreaming, understand, interpret and respond to this agenda. This paper examines whether and why local feminist movements in two cities in eastern Germany adopt gender mainstreaming. Consideration of the characteristics of the contexts in which local feminist movements are embedded clarifies the conditions under which social movements rally round new policy paradigms.

Introduction

Since the mid-1990s, gender mainstreaming has become an increasingly central part of the social policy agenda of the European Union (EU) and many of its member states. Gender mainstreaming seeks to assess the gendered implications of policies and to integrate equal opportunities for women and men into policymaking at all levels of governance. While gender mainstreaming has sparked debate even among its proponents within the EU's governing bodies, gender mainstreaming is generally positioned as a new strategy or tool that will benefit feminist interests by challenging gender inequalities.

Yet not all feminists embrace gender mainstreaming as a potentially helpful new policy agenda. This has been very evident in scholarly discussions and debates about gender mainstreaming (e.g., Daly 2005; Stratigaki 2005; Verloo 2005; Woodward 2003). Feminist activists who typically advocate around policy issues also appear to have mixed responses to this policy concept, which may effect if and how gender mainstreaming diffuses across feminist social movements.

This paper draws on perspectives on policy diffusion to explore the conditions under which existing social movements adopt new issues as part of their agenda. While not assuming *a priori* that social movement support will be necessary for the diffusion of a new policy, existing social movements and their attendant organizations often become key players in pushing for the adoption and/or enforcement of new policies, especially when such policies appear to further social movement goals. Environmental organizations, for example, have mobilized around new policy ideas and/or practices that they see as advancing their cause (Daley 2007). Still, not all social movements will advocate or serve as watchdogs for new policy ideas simply because they become available.

To identify the diverse factors which influence whether social movements adopt or reject new policy paradigms as part of their agendas, I examine the level of adoption of gender mainstreaming within two local women's movements in eastern Germany. Feminist activists and femocrats in the northeastern Baltic port of Rostock have actively adopted gender mainstreaming into local organizations, making gender mainstreaming a rallying point of their advocacy work. While my focus is on diffusion across social movements and not across state institutions, it is worth noting that, with pressure from feminist organizations, Rostock became the first city anywhere in Germany to pass a citywide gender mainstreaming ordinance in 2001. The ordinance requires all municipal agencies and their contractors to utilize gender mainstreaming to assess the gendered implications of policy practices and changes, and to make necessary corrections to avoid or reduce any gender disparities that are discovered. In the southeastern city of Erfurt, also in the former German Democratic Republic (GDR, or East Germany), however, policymakers and feminist activists had not taken any significant steps to integrate gender mainstreaming into their organizations through the end of 2005. In spite of a number of shared features and conditions across the two cities, and, perhaps even most importantly, in spite of a good deal of disagreement among feminists in both cities about the value of gender mainstreaming, the fate of the EU's agenda for gender mainstreaming has proven quite different among feminist activists in these two settings thus far.

While the extant scholarship on gender mainstreaming widely conceptualizes this policy agenda as primarily relevant at the national and supranational level (but see Greed 2004), gender mainstreaming can, and according to EU policymakers *should,* be implemented among local states. Yet to date, the focal points in analyses of gender mainstreaming have been on critical evaluations of gender mainstreaming theory and praxis by feminist scholars (Beveridge, Nott and Stephen 2000; Booth and Bennett 2002; Squires 2005; Verloo 2001; Walby 2005; Woodward 2003) and/or on comparative analyses of national-level implementation (Daly 2005; True and Mintrom 2001; Woodward 2003). While such efforts provide valuable insight into the policy diffusion process at the national level—and have been especially influential in establishing that feminist transnational networks are central in the diffusion of gender mainstreaming across national borders (True and Mintrom 2001)—these accounts don't explain local-level factors that might influence the adoption of gender mainstreaming among local feminist movements. The present research builds on these endeavors by examining the perspectives of non-elite, non-EU actors who, to date, have been notably absent in the scholarship on

gender mainstreaming. This provides an important window into how social actors who are likely to be involved in its diffusion and implementation on the ground actually understand and receive gender mainstreaming.

The rich literature on policy diffusion among states and state institutions informs the framework for exploring policy diffusion among feminist social movement actors. States and social movements typically face different constraints and opportunities and have different levels of accountability to the public. Nonetheless, general concepts used to explain policy diffusion across state and state institutions could help explain when and why policy ideas are picked up by social movements. I consider elements from several theoretical traditions in the literature on policy diffusion, and in doing so, demonstrate the utility of applying ideas from this body of scholarship to social movements. Internal determinants of social policy adoption include organizational resources, ideologies, institutional dynamics and capacity *within* a given feminist movement. Diffusion of innovation perspectives, on the other hand, focus on external determinants, such as pressures from external sources, and opportunities and limitations presented by the state as relevant for shaping responses to new policies (Berry and Berry 1999; Daley 2007). Diffusion of innovation perspectives thus echo neo-institutional models that hone in on isomorphism and view policy adoption as a new way to gain legitimacy.

Both internal and external factors also reflect processes occurring at multiple scales of action (Krook 2006). The localities within which these feminist movements operate are nested in regional, national and transnational systems. I thus approach policy diffusion across social movements as potentially influenced not only by local and domestic factors, but also by transnational dimensions.

I begin by introducing the complex gender mainstreaming paradigm and some of its possibilities and pitfalls. I then briefly discuss the research design and data sources utilized in this project. I subsequently turn to the cases at hand to illuminate why the local feminist movements in Rostock and Erfurt have responded so differently to gender mainstreaming as a policy innovation. I discover that feminist attitudes towards gender mainstreaming do not predict its adoption in these two cities, but rather that the conjuncture of a set of factors both internal and external to these movements helps explain the divergent levels of adoption of gender mainstreaming among local feminist movements.

Understanding Gender Mainstreaming

Since its formal introduction into the European Commission in 1996, gender mainstreaming has been the source of considerable confusion and consternation among EU policymakers and the EU public alike. According to the Group of Specialists of the Council of Europe, gender mainstreaming is "the (re)organization, improvement, development and evaluation of policy processes, so that a gender equality perspective is incorporated in all policies, at all levels and at all stages, by the actors normally involved in policymaking" (Group of Specialists on Mainstreaming 1998). Alternatively described in EU documents and by gender mainstreaming advocates as a theory, method, tool, strategy, concept, program or mechanism (Booth and Bennett 2002), gender mainstreaming seeks to provide new approaches for gender-sensitive policymaking by drawing attention to how policies at various levels of governance may differentially affect women and men and by redressing differences when they are discovered. Recognizing that even policies that appear gender neutral can have a differential impact, the gender mainstreaming approach calls for examination of the potentially gendered effects of policies before they are implemented (Squires 2007).

A core assumption underlying gender mainstreaming is that gender is socially created and embedded in organizations, including the state. Rather than denying the state's complicity in gender inequality, the gender mainstreaming framework recognizes that states (re)produce gender relations and inequalities, and therefore must be activated if gender equality is to be achieved (Schmidt 2005). Specifically, gender mainstreaming accepts the feminist contention that many state policies and practices which appear to be gender neutral are, in fact, based on men's interests and an expectation of men citizens. Gender mainstreaming also calls for an interrogation of state policies to identify if and how gender is embedded. Gender mainstreaming pushes for incorporation of gender issues into all aspects of governance and public policy and moves against the treatment of women's issues as a distinct policy problem (Mazey 2001).

The gender mainstreaming approach also holds that gender inequalities harm both men and women. The goal, then, is to alter social structures so that gender inequalities are neutralized. Gender mainstreaming is thus different from equal treatment and positive action, which typically target only women in their efforts at placing women on equal footing with men, and represents a "third path" towards gender equality (Rees 1998). Gender mainstreaming also implies a vision of a future in which women and men share equal responsibilities in work, family and politics.

Since the introduction of gender mainstreaming by the European Commission in 1996, the EU has taken steps to encourage the adoption of gender mainstreaming among member states. The EU educates leaders from the member states on gender mainstreaming in an effort to increase awareness of this policy agenda. Since 2003, the Commission of European Communities' Unit on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men has been required to present an annual report on gender mainstreaming in the EU to the European Council and European Parliament. With the introduction of a new roadmap for equality between women and men in place for 2006-2010 and with 2007 designated the European Year of Opportunity for All, the propagation of gender mainstreaming shows no immediate signs of abating, although it is in a constant state of transformation. Perhaps most importantly for member states, receipt of various forms of EU monies is contingent on the implementation of gender mainstreaming programs at the national level within member states.

Intended to complement positive action programs for women, rather than to replace them, gender mainstreaming has proven contentious among feminist activists, scholars, and policymakers. Walby (2005) has identified no fewer than six major areas of debate related to gender mainstreaming, while Woodward (2003) discusses an additional three areas of conflict uniquely different from those Walby addresses. Some question whether gender mainstreaming offers a meaningful or viable strategy for reducing gender inequality (Booth and Bennett 2002; Verloo 2001). Others fear that if gender mainstreaming moves gender issues out of the policy ghetto, it will also move gender issues out of the control of feminists, thus resulting in dilution (Woodward 2003). Recent critiques have questioned whether gender mainstreaming necessarily reflects and promotes a feminist agenda, or if its more gender neutral approach undercuts feminist politics (Lombardo and Meier 2006). Another major concern is that, in climates hostile to women's interests, gender mainstreaming will provide a smokescreen behind which state actors can reduce or eliminate programs specifically targeting women, such as affirmative action policies or funds for services for women (Stratigaki 2005; Woodward 2003).

That EU policies and practices of gender mainstreaming are themselves sometimes contradictory, or involve multiple approaches to gender inequality, further renders the concept "fuzzy" (Booth and Bennett 2002). This fuzziness is only enhanced by the complexity of gender mainstreaming, both as an idea and as a program to be implemented. Various EU documents lay out a series of sophisticated discussions of the premise of gender mainstreaming, as well as of the various methods of implementation. The idea is difficult to capture in a sound bite or even in a brochure; as one respondent in this project declared, "You can't even explain it one sentence. You have to use ten sentences, and then attend a seminar!"

An additional challenge to the successful diffusion of the gender mainstreaming agenda is that it is referred to in English throughout the member states of the European Union, rather than being translated into languages specific to each member state. Even in English, the term has little intuitive meaning, but in other languages it is often difficult to pronounce, let alone understand. As an English phrase in non-English-speaking nations, it can be interpreted as nonsensical and foreign (Booth and Bennett 2002).

To date, gender mainstreaming has also not attracted significant attention from national women's movements within the EU. Woodward (2003) argues that gender mainstreaming should be attractive to feminist social movement actors because it presents a unique opportunity to move women's issues out of the policy ghetto, and offers an innovative and potentially revolutionary new model for gender relations. In their analysis of gender mainstreaming diffusion in 157 countries, True and Mintrom (2001) find that feminist transnational advocacy networks involving femocrats and international nongovernmental organizations play a

key role in the dissemination and implementation of gender mainstreaming. Yet locally-based, grassroots feminist social movement organizations within EU member states have been relatively quiet on this issue.

In Germany, non-state feminists have not rallied around gender mainstreaming. Although feminist social movement actors arguably should be those serving as gender mainstreaming watchdogs, this does not appear to be occurring at the national level in Germany. This may be because feminist activity in Germany tends to be more localized, occurring primarily at the level of municipalities and local states. Gender mainstreaming could be a useful policy paradigm for promoting feminist interests at subnational levels of governance, and certainly the EU intends for gender mainstreaming to be implemented at all levels of the state. Yet gender mainstreaming is experiencing uneven adoption across local feminist movements.

Background & Methods

To explore the reception of gender mainstreaming among feminist social movement actors and femocrats, I compare how the local women's movements in two cities in eastern Germany, Rostock and Erfurt, have responded to this policy agenda. As indicated earlier, state and feminist social movement actors have adopted gender mainstreaming to very different degrees in these two cities. This cannot be explained by the demographic features of the two cities, as they are of equal size and are home to populations with virtually identical characteristics in terms of distribution by age, gender, race, income, educational attainment and so forth. Both cities operate with comparable budgets and face the same core problems that all cities in eastern Germany have grappled with since German unification in 1990, namely high unemployment, slow economic redevelopment and the devastating out-migration of residents to western Germany or other parts of Europe. They also share virtually identical structures of local governance.

Both cities also have vibrant feminist movements. Although feminist organizing in eastern Germany has fallen out of the limelight since the collapse of state socialism in 1989 and the unification of East and West Germany in 1990, it continues at the local level there (Guenther 2006). Seeking both outlets for their feminist political impulses and sources of employment during an era of major economic upheaval, many women who joined the national-level mobilizations of 1989-90 have since turned to local women's projects that are typically organized around a specific feminist issue, such as violence against women or women's employment opportunities (Lang 2000). These organizations usually offer both social service provisioning, such as rape crisis and domestic violence intervention counseling, or job training and referrals, while also engaging in policy advocacy targeting mostly municipalities and local states.

Although there is a good deal of variation across organizations comprising them, these local feminist movements may be fairly described as state-centered. Feminist organizations in eastern Germany often receive a significant proportion of funding from state agencies, and organizations routinely work closely with femocrats, many of whom in turn are also involved in feminist organizations as members of boards of directors or as staff or volunteers. Most femocratic positions, such as municipal Gender Equity Representatives, or political appointees who oversee matters related to gender and women in municipal governance, and who serve to support and assist women's organizations and individual women, were created in 1990 without significant input or pressure from feminist organizers (Ferree 1995; Lang 2000). Still, increasing the capacity of Gender Equity Representatives at the municipal and local state levels has been a key goal of feminist mobilizations in eastern Germany. Feminist organizations and femocrats work to mutually establish and reinforce one another's legitimacy, and typically work closely together. While this state dependence may be problematic as some critics of state-centered or "NGO feminism" have noted (Einhorn 2000; Einhorn and Sever 2003; Lang 2000), it would also suggest that both movements would be competent and able to respond to a new policy paradigm such as gender mainstreaming.

The present analysis draws on observations, archival data and in-depth interviews with sixty-three feminist activists, or women who are or have been active in the women's movement at some point since 1989, and femocrats, or elected or appointed feminist state officials, in Rostock and Erfurt, to tease out why feminist organizations in Rostock have adopted gender mainstreaming while those in Erfurt have not. I con-

ducted semi-structured interviews with thirty-two women in Rostock and thirty-one women in Erfurt.[1] In Rostock, the sample included five women who function primarily as femocrats, and twenty-seven women who are principally activists.[2] Because Erfurt is also the capital city of the state of Thüringen, the sample there includes a greater proportion of femocrats: eight women served primarily as femocrats, while the remaining twenty-three were activists. Interviews generally lasted at least ninety minutes, and were routinely as long as three to four hours. During these conversations, respondents and I discussed various aspects of their work with women's organizations and women's politics, including gender mainstreaming. Interviews were especially useful in establishing participants' views of gender mainstreaming and their understanding of why gender mainstreaming was or was not being adopted into their local women's movement.

Participant observation at state offices and women's organizations augments the interview data, as does archival data from over two dozen women's organizations and state offices in the two cities. Observations at meetings about gender mainstreaming were especially useful for acquiring information about how gender mainstreaming is framed and understood by feminist actors. Archival materials, on the other hand, offered insight into the growth of emphasis on gender mainstreaming within feminist organizations. Meeting notes and newsletters from organizations, as well as certain legislative documents, reveal how gender mainstreaming is understood among, and marketed to, movement participants, policymakers and the public. All data analysis was completed in the original German; translations here are mine.

Qualitative data are especially well suited for exploring how social actors make sense of new policy paradigms. While the literature on policy diffusion is dominated by quantitative approaches, qualitative approaches to policy diffusion enrich discussions about the circumstances under which policy ideas take hold by unearthing processes of meaning making. In the case of gender mainstreaming, qualitative methods help clarify the complexity of grappling with new policy agendas and with understandings of gender by exploring how activists on the ground experience and understand this new policy paradigm and its relationship to existing strategies for resisting unequal gender relations.

Gender Innovations in the Feminist Movement in Rostock

Beginning already in the late 1990s, when gender mainstreaming was first appearing on the EU agenda, feminists in Rostock began integrating the perspective into their work with feminist organizations there. By 2000, feminist activists in Rostock had founded a women's organization dedicated solely to education and advocacy around gender mainstreaming (German-speakers may visit the organization at http://www.gm-consult-mv.org). Several other organizations were receiving funding for services through EU programs specifically supporting or espousing gender mainstreaming. With shepherding from the city's Gender Equity Representative, Rostock became the first municipality in Germany to pass a citywide gender mainstreaming ordinance in 2001.

The adoption and implementation of gender mainstreaming in feminist organizations—and, ultimately, in the municipality—was swift and comprehensive. This is true even though only roughly one-third of respondents in this study from Rostock were strong advocates for gender mainstreaming. Another third were ambivalent about gender mainstreaming, or felt they didn't know enough about it to take a strong position, while the final third of the sample held negative views towards gender mainstreaming. Most commonly, those who disliked gender mainstreaming feared it would undercut support for services specifically targeting wom-

---

[1]Men were not specifically excluded from the study, but none emerged as relevant for the goals of the larger research project. Importantly, my account does not include the voices of EU policymakers themselves. My interest here is not in how the EU intends for feminist activists to understand gender mainstreaming, but rather how they actually understand it it.

[2]Many femocrats are also staff members, board members or volunteers with activist organizations. Likewise, many activists have served as political appointees. In assessing their primary roles, I identified women based on how they identify themselves and where they have done most of their work: either in state positions or in organizing positions outside of the state.

en, resented that it was not translated into German, and/or found it too complex to understand and therefore thought it would have limited public appeal.

Factors both internal and external to the feminist movement in Rostock help explain its rapid and open adoption by feminists there in spite of the apparent absence of unilateral support for gender mainstreaming among feminists. Internal factors include ideological congruence with gender mainstreaming, movement cohesion and cooperativeness, and the presence of credible feminist articulators. The gender mainstreaming framework took hold quickly in part because of the congruence between the gender mainstreaming framework and local feminist ideologies. Feminists in Rostock primarily emphasize women's status as workers and their rights to participate fully in paid employment. Reflecting the gender ideology of the GDR, in which women and men were seen as collaborators in the socialist project and in which gender interests were positioned as threats to class solidarity, feminists in Rostock also stress the negative effects of gender inequality on both women and on men. Unlike more radical, separatist feminist ideologies common among women's projects in western Germany, feminists in Rostock encourage men's cooperation and believe that improving women's status in society is beneficial to all. Following these logics, gender mainstreaming is identified as building on a positive dimension of the GDR and as the continuation of core values about gender from the socialist era because it does not focus only on women. Even many of those who held negative views of gender mainstreaming noted that it resonated with their general ideology. As one respondent put it, "Gender mainstreaming just clicks here."

Ideological cohesion within the women's movement and an environment of cooperation also helped speed the transmission and acceptance of gender mainstreaming. Women's organizations in Rostock are closely networked, with many organizations operating under shared umbrellas or working in shared physical spaces. Most activists within the movement are friends. In this collegial and close-knit community, ideas are transmitted quickly and easily, and activists and femocrats tend to want to hear what others have to say and to support colleagues in new endeavors.

As a result of these strong social networks, even feminists who are not especially supportive of gender mainstreaming joined the effort to educate others about it. One long-time feminist, for example, worked closely to secure funding for several gender mainstreaming projects within the organization of which she is the director. She has also been a strong supporter of the one organization in Rostock dedicated exclusively to gender mainstreaming. Simultaneously, she has strong reservations about the policy agenda:

> You also have to approach gender mainstreaming quite critically. You can't just assume that men are going to jump on the gender mainstreaming bandwagon with a big cheer. Because, quite simply, they lose resource because of it…I don't entirely trust the top-down approach [taken by the EU], and I am not convinced that this can work because so many different things would need to be changed, and we won't find open doors and we'll have to fight so much for it. That's why I don't assume that it will work out, that just because it's called 'gender mainstreaming,' suddenly everyone will be sensitive to equality politics and march off in pursuit of gender equality.

This activist clearly has multiple concerns about gender mainstreaming, including about its effectiveness, potential to effect change and strategy of implementation. Yet in spite of these reservations, she was able to set aside her concerns to support colleagues and friends who strongly advocate for gender mainstreaming, largely because she believes that a range of different approaches to tackling gender inequality is warranted.

Finally, the presence of credible articulators within the local feminist movement facilitated the adoption of gender mainstreaming. The women's movement in Rostock includes several women who are especially well-positioned to disseminate information about gender mainstreaming. After unification, many East German academics lost their jobs, and several former professors from the university in Rostock began working in women's organizations instead. These women have experience and expertise in tackling complex concepts

such as gender mainstreaming, and in disseminating information to students. In Rostock, several former academics spearheaded the move towards gender mainstreaming, and serve as key educators on the topic. Other activists and policymakers in Rostock hold them in high regard as feminists and educators. These gender mainstreaming advocates have been able to quickly and effectively share information about gender mainstreaming.

Functioning both within and outside of the local feminist movement, ties to Scandinavia, and especially Sweden, also promoted the adoption of gender mainstreaming. Collaboration through a regional advocacy network between activists and policymakers in Rostock and in Sweden also contributed to the adoption of the gender mainstreaming concept in Rostock (Adams and Kang 2007). Through these encounters, activists in Rostock were presented with a learning opportunity through which they were able to identify the benefits of gender mainstreaming and understand how it might be implemented in their community. Early proponents of gender mainstreaming in Rostock included feminist activists and policymakers who have traveled to Sweden—often several times—as members of study groups invited by Swedish feminists and policymakers to learn about gender mainstreaming and to witness its effects. Sweden was a pioneer in the adoption of gender mainstreaming, and leaders and activists in Rostock received frequent, comprehensive access to information about gender mainstreaming via Swedish colleagues. As Uschi, a leader in an organization specifically dedicated to education on gender mainstreaming, explains:

> We tried quite hard to build this project out of the Swedish experience. In Sweden, people just take gender mainstreaming for granted; it's just seen as something normal, as something that simply belongs in society, and as something that benefits everyone, women and men. And somehow it's fun and just a part of their quality of life. And so we said, 'Good, we'll go check this thing out, to see what it's all about,' and then we organized many educational trips to Sweden. We also took many politicians with us so that they could just see what the situation there was like and truly experience the spirit of it, and we did a lot of publicizing about Swedish equality politics and gender mainstreaming. And [another activist] Rosamund organized a whole series of events about it, and really worked to build up a network…. And it became ever clearer to me that gender mainstreaming was practical, and that we really needed to bring it into our politics here, and also into the regional politics [of the local state].... And with the help of the *Landesfrauenrat* [state women's lobby], we did just that.

In this account, Uschi describes gender mainstreaming as something that must be experienced in order to be understood. To that end, she and her colleague worked to bring political and feminist leaders to Sweden to see first-hand how it benefits everyone. Through these experiences, she became increasingly convinced of the importance of integrating gender mainstreaming into local politics, and worked with major women's organizations to accomplish this. Activists and femocrats in Rostock came to view Swedish social policy, specifically as it pertains to gender politics, as the international leader, and they repeatedly invoked their efforts at following the Swedish models of high levels of state support for working parents and of gender mainstreaming.

Even the city of Rostock's municipal ordinance on gender mainstreaming establishes its Swedish roots by referencing Swedish models of gender policy twice just in the law's preamble. Already in its opening sentences, the ordinance draws directly on what policymakers in Rostock refer to as "the Swedish model." Reference to Sweden is important because the city positions itself as more linked to the Scandinavian and Baltic states than to the unified Germany and western Europe (Guenther 2006). Situated on the Baltic seacoast, Rostock's history has centered on its status as a port city and its connections with Scandinavia, and especially Sweden. Adopting gender mainstreaming builds on—and helps maintain—this important regional tie.

In terms of factors external to the feminist movement in Rostock, the broader political climate in the city and region has also played a critical part in the resonance and integration of gender mainstreaming there. Politics in Rostock and Mecklenburg-Vorpommern veer out of the German mainstream and to the left. While especially in the 1990s, many other regions in eastern Germany shunned the post-socialist reimagining of the ruling party of East Germany, the Baltic coast has consistently retained high levels of support for the Socialist left through 2006. The left-leaning political culture in Rostock and in the state of Mecklenburg-Vorpommern has been highly supportive of women's organizations since unification, in spite of budgetary issues that are becoming increasingly problematic. This has two important implications for the adoption and implementation of gender mainstreaming. First, femocrats, such as the municipal and statewide Gender Equity Representatives, as well as local women's organizations, and most especially the State Women's Lobby, the non-partisan statewide political network of women's organizations, have the legitimacy and capacity within the municipality and local state to introduce and pass new policy initiatives. Second, the local political climate has created a stable environment in which feminist activists can pursue diverse paradigms, such as gender mainstreaming, without the threat of losing state support. Rostock and Mecklenburg-Vorpommern offer an environment in which feminists feel safe to explore diverse policy paradigms. The idea of gender mainstreaming is relatively low-risk in this environment as the political and discursive opportunity structure in Rostock creates space for feminist experimentation. This increases the credibility of gender mainstreaming among feminist actors because, in this context, it seems plausible, if not probable, that the state will cooperate in meaningfully implementing gender mainstreaming, while also continuing to support other feminist goals.

A final external motivator is more instrumental, namely that the implementation of gender mainstreaming is also attached to the prospect of receiving EU funds. This further increases its appeal, especially among feminists working in local women's organizations. Like many other eastern German cities, Rostock has experienced significant out-migration since 1990, dropping in size from just over 250,000 in 1989 to just under 200,000 in 2000. Coupled with the economic difficulties accompanying unification, out-migration has contributed to a shrinking tax base and smaller city coffers. While the city government supports the work of over a dozen women's organizations offering services ranging from shelter for survivors of domestic violence to employment training, the city is unable to fully fund women's organizations.[3] The decline is municipal and local state funding in the late 1990s was offset by the introduction of EU funding sources focused on gender issues and gender mainstreaming. In the early 2000s, at least three women's organizations in Rostock received the majority of their funding from the EU, and many more utilize EU funding to support specific initiatives or projects.

In sum, Rostock's position near Sweden and its regional identification and integration with Sweden enabled easy transmission of the concept of gender mainstreaming. Gender ideologies both within the local state and among feminist actors with which the concept of gender mainstreaming is highly congruent and resonant increased its appeal and rendered the policy agenda viable, even among those who are uncertain about it. The political arena is open to new ideas that stress equality, and femocrats in particular are seen as legitimate participants in the political process. The strong capacity of feminist bureaucrats and activists, the entrenchment of Gender Equity Representatives within local levels of governance, and the responsiveness of the dominant political parties to feminist concerns created an environment in which gender mainstreaming could be effectively introduced, discussed, and implemented. The presence of credible local experts within the movement furthered understanding of the idea, and while gender mainstreaming may have taken hold in Rostock with or without these women, they expedited its implementation in the work of women's organizations and the local state. Ultimately, this confluence of factors internal and external to the feminist movement in Rostock rendered gender mainstreaming credible and salient for feminist activists and femocrats in Rostock, leading to its adoption there.

---

[3]Unlike the United States, neither western, but especially not eastern Germany, has a history of private philanthropy. Foundation monies and private donations are extremely uncommon.

Resisting Gender Mainstreaming in Erfurt

The situation in Erfurt has been quite different. In Erfurt, gender mainstreaming has been conspicuously absent from the agendas of feminist organizations or the feminist movement more broadly. Although in Erfurt, as in Rostock, individual responses to gender mainstreaming among feminists varied, feminist organizations are not working towards integrating gender mainstreaming into their work. A small cadre comprised mostly of femocrats have attempted to propagate gender mainstreaming, but with limited success.

Part of the difficulty these supporters face is that they are attempting to effect change within a highly polarized feminist movement in which many actors already feel threatened. The local state apparatus is dominated by the Christian Democratic Union (CDU), Germany's largest right party, which typically avoids policy interventions into inequalities and is often hostile to feminist concerns. Activists in Erfurt consistently reported that the local state is unsupportive of feminist issues, reluctant to subsidize feminist social service organizations, and unable to reconcile the religious underpinnings of the ruling party with women's needs for child care, reproductive health, protection from violence and empowerment. This is especially the case for the local state of Thüringen, of which Erfurt is the capital city; feminists see the city government itself is seen as slightly more accessible, particularly in the early 1990s when the city provided a great deal of funding to feminist social service providers. However, by the early 2000s, when gender mainstreaming was really appearing on the policy scene, both city and state were using the logic of budgetary shortfalls to curtail programs and services related to gender and feminist issues.

The women's movement in Erfurt has also struggled because of ideological conflicts within the movement itself. One major camp of feminists is radical separatist feminists. Gender mainstreaming is at odds with the inherent ideology of radical feminism on several fronts. First, it is a policy that emanates from, and centers on, the state, which radical feminists seek autonomy from and approach with wariness. Second, they interpret gender mainstreaming as overemphasizing the negative consequences of gender inequality for men and as failing to adequately address women's oppression. In one conversation with a group of staff members and volunteers at a key radical feminist organization in Erfurt, the dominant theme was that the consequences of gender inequality are far more severe for women than for men, but gender mainstreaming tries to make it all sound the same. As staff members noted, in a patriarchal society, victims of battering, rape and incest are overwhelmingly women, and experiences with these forms of violence are far more detrimental to an individual's mental and physical well-being than the more typically male experience of gender inequality in which men are positioned as secondary caregivers to children or as the primary breadwinner for a family. Finally, many radical feminists are suspicious of gender mainstreaming *because* of its similarity to the gender ideology of the GDR, which they feel offered a false promise of equality to mask what they saw as an inherently patriarchal state.

Somewhat ironically, the major proponents of gender mainstreaming in Erfurt are femocrats who are generally active in the CDU. At first glance, it would seem that gender mainstreaming would also not fare well among these women because of its emphasis on gender sameness as a desired outcome and its implicit support for a strong state that intervenes to reduce inequality, a violation of their support for free markets. Yet some of these feminists have actively embraced gender mainstreaming and now form a core group of gender mainstreaming advocates. For these women, gender mainstreaming is appealing primarily because it is seemingly less radical than the radical feminists' models for gender relations. Since it addresses men's concerns as well as women's concerns, conservative feminists hope that gender mainstreaming will be less threatening to male colleagues than other feminist concepts, and therefore may have a higher chance of effecting change. While they think the so-called Swedish model "goes too far"—especially insofar as they believe women should be primarily responsible for the care of very young children—they support the basic idea that women and men should have more equal opportunities in education, employment, and balancing work and family obligations.

This small pool of gender mainstreaming advocates has had little success in changing the minds of their peers within the women's movement more broadly. The fear that the state will use gender mainstream-

ing to undercut the few programs for women the movement has succeeded in securing seems like too great a risk for most activists and femocrats to support the idea. Unlike those in Rostock, feminists in Erfurt operate under the constant threat of a conservative state apparatus that has little interest in women's issues. The interpretation of experience can eliminate alternatives from the repertoire available to potential social movement and policy innovators; in this case, feminists' negative experiences in making demands of the state limit their willingness to engage with a potentially risky policy advance. Because the women's movement in Erfurt—including both radical and more conservative feminist groups—has routinely encountered roadblocks in trying to effect change through state institutions, the idea of introducing a new agenda seems unfeasible, if not dangerous.

Given its proximity to western Germany and its solid transportation infrastructure, as well as its negative evaluations of life under socialism and positive interpretation of unification, Erfurt, and its local women's movement, is significantly influenced by western Germany. The autonomous women's movement in western Germany, some of whose members are active coalition partners with radical feminists in Erfurt, also views gender mainstreaming with skepticism. Western German feminists transmit rumors to feminists in Erfurt that some state offices and autonomous women's organizations focused on gender issues in cities and states in western Germany were shut down or lost their funding after municipal and local state governments implemented gender mainstreaming.[4] Close linkages between feminists in Erfurt and western German feminists—particularly apparent in coalition work between radical separatist feminists from both sides of the former border—results in the transmission of fears in the western German women's project culture to Erfurt.

Tatiana, a state representative for an opposition party on the left, expresses these fears:

> I also have big concerns about it, that there is little readiness for real change. Right now, I see more of the dangers of gender mainstreaming [than of its possible benefits], that through it we can find a justification for weakening support for women, but without any possibility of replacing women's politics with something new.

Here, Tatiana, like many of her colleagues in government and feminist organizations, also references the many frames for dealing with gender inequality. Since unification, there has been a parade of catchwords: women's politics (*Frauenpolitik*), support for women and women's issues (*Frauenförderung*), and gender equality politics (*Gleichstellungspolitik*). Each has a slightly different connotation in terms of emphasis and, according to some, degree of critical feminism. Radical feminists especially tend to resist the move from woman-centered to gender-centered rhetoric, evident also in the change in rubric from women's politics to gender equality politics, and from stressing women's subordinate status to emphasizing gender inequalities.

That gender mainstreaming is especially complex doesn't make it any easier to increase its appeal. Coupled with the state's unresponsiveness to feminist concerns, this complexity limits femocrats' willingness to push the issue. As one respondent, Sonja, an upper-level femocrat who identifies herself as a supporter of gender mainstreaming, told me:

> Already the wording of it makes it almost impossible to translate into German. Maybe it works in England, but here it just doesn't make any sense…. You have to explain so much about it, and that simply makes it difficult. I think support for women was already difficult enough to justify. It's my feeling that, well, in the last few years, we started to notice that we were making progress. Things got a little better. One started to feel accepted and it was certainly the case that we were integrated. But now with this new gender agenda, or gender mainstreaming, this is again something that, in my

---

[4]I was unable to corroborate these claims.

> view, is difficult, because it's something new again and not a soul under-
> stands it and no one wants to hear about it.

In this account, gender mainstreaming is a cause for concern because it is difficult to explain and to comprehend, and would potentially try the patience of fellow policymakers. Sonja also feels that her office has been successful in making inroads in the last few years, and that attempting to introduce a new concept—and such a complex one at that—will undermine their gradual progress.

Interestingly, feminist activists in Erfurt fail to see any benefits from gender mainstreaming, and are largely not enticed by the possible monetary benefits of adopting gender mainstreaming programs or perspectives within their organizations, even though they, as a whole, receive far less support from the city and the local state than their counterparts in Rostock. Given the extreme difficulty they have experienced in securing municipal and statewide funding for women's organizations, these women should presumably embrace a new resource for funding their organizations. Instead, ideological and political considerations mostly outweigh economic necessity.

Still, some women are more optimistic than Sonja about the prospects of gender mainstreaming in Erfurt. Maria, a state representative for the CDU, discusses some of the problems she has encountered with gender mainstreaming, as well as her hopes for this policy agenda:

> …When one meets a state representative outside of the parliament—the
> men, anyway—they approach me and say, 'Gender mainstreaming! Now
> you've really cooked up something new, you women. Isn't it enough for
> you that you're already involved everywhere?' Because they don't under-
> stand it…The first time we brought up the issue of violence against women,
> they all laughed, 'Now she shows up with this issue in which no one is in-
> terested. It's all bunk. That only happens in the lower social classes, in the
> asocial milieu; normal people don't beat each other up.' But now we've
> achieved that everyone says, 'OK, you were actually right. When you really
> look around, this does happen.' So I hope the same will happen [with gen-
> der mainstreaming], only it is a process that will take a long time.

Here, Maria reports that male colleagues in the state parliament see gender mainstreaming as the lat-est in a string of feminist concoctions. While aware of men's resistance to gender mainstreaming, she also knows that change takes time, and she hopes that resistance to gender mainstreaming will erode over time, just as resistance to attention to the issue of domestic violence did.

Given the lack of legitimacy of the core group of advocates in Erfurt, however, this seems unlikely. The propagation of gender mainstreaming has been slowed by the absence of credible leaders focusing on this topic and by the fact that femocrats and feminist activists alike have low levels of legitimacy in the eyes of the state and therefore limited capacity to effect change. The women CDU politicians with an interest in gen-der mainstreaming are a small and relatively powerless group within their own party, which is significantly more male-dominated than the other major political parties. They also have histories of animosity with radical feminists and feminist organizations in Erfurt and Thüringen. Unlike in Rostock, the women in Erfurt who support gender mainstreaming participate in a highly divided women's movement. As such, the elected CDU officials are neither credible among their political colleagues nor among the radical feminists who dominate the non-profit sector and the women's political lobby. The latter point further undermines their credibility with other state leaders, who wonder aloud "who these so-called leaders even represent since the feminists can't even get it together." Consequently, their power to introduce new legislative agendas is limited.

In sum, gender mainstreaming is not entirely resonant with either radical or more moderate and con-servative feminists in the women's movement in Erfurt, but some conservative feminists have accepted it as worthwhile cause nonetheless, viewing it as a more promising route to gender equality than radical feminist politics. However, given the ideological rifts within the movement, they are not legitimate articulators of gen-

der mainstreaming among other feminists, and thus the concept has not spread within the movement. Likewise, they aren't credible within the dominant political party, and can't effect change there, either. The conservative political climate increases perceived threat among members of both ideological camps, but especially for radical feminists. Coupled with the spread of fears about gender mainstreaming from western Germany coalition partners, the low level of state responsiveness to feminist demands also limits opportunities for activists and femocrats to feel safe enough to take risks with a new policy idea.

Conclusion

While Europeanization may well be an important new force leading to greater policy homogeneity in Europe, local settings continue to serve as important filters for how international pressures and agendas are negotiated. Feminist movements develop responses to new policy ideas that are grounded in specific, local experiences. Factors both internal and external to feminist movements shape the organized response to new policy paradigms. Table 1 lists the factors that emerged as especially salient during the course of this analysis. The structure and cohesion of women's movements, local political cultures and opportunity structures, and femocrats' capacity have effected whether or not gender mainstreaming is adopted in Rostock and Erfurt.

Extant perspectives on policy diffusion among states and institutions are helpful in explaining diffusion among social movements. A lack of adoption among movements doesn't necessarily indicate a lack of support, nor does adoption mean a movement supports a policy. Rather, factors both internal and external to these local feminist movements are implicated in the responses to gender mainstreaming within them. Importantly, while internal and external pressures that contribute to diffusion are often viewed as dichotomous, this analysis reveals that the categories of internal and external forces are not necessarily mutually exclusive. Linkages between the state and feminist organizations bridge the boundary between endogenous and exogenous forces. Some broader social forces—like ties to specific other regions—also effect both movements and the broader structures in which they are embedded, like the local state.

The ultimate integration of gender mainstreaming into feminist politics and organizing in Rostock and Erfurt is dependent not on individual responses to the policy initiative, but rather on structural features of these two movements and the environments in which they operate. In fact, rates of support for gender mainstreaming among feminist activists were roughly equal in the two cities. What emerges as more important than attitudes towards gender mainstreaming is the capacity for local feminist movements to take on a new policy paradigm.

Table 1: Factors Shaping Responses to Gender Mainstreaming Mainstreaming in Rostock and Erfurt

		Rostock	**Erfurt**
Internal (Movement) Factors	Ideological cohesion & resonance	High	Low
	Sense of threat, conflict & competition	Low	High
	Credible articulators	Present	Absent
External factors	Political climate	Left	Right
	State responsiveness to feminist demands	Responsive	Unresponsive
	Regional orientation	Sweden	Western Germany
Outcome	Response to gender mainstreaming	Adoption	Rejection

This capacity in turn is shaped by numerous factors. In Rostock, the left-leaning political climate, state receptiveness to feminist demands and the high capacity of femocrats created an environment in which gender mainstreaming was highly resonant, and which was also well-suited to actually implementing it. Historic and contemporary ties to Sweden provided an additional learning opportunity for both activists and policymakers, and the adoption of gender mainstreaming allowed both groups to make claims of building on an important transnational partnership.

In contrast, Erfurt's conservative political climate produced a state apparatus more closed to feminist concerns, and where the capacity of femocrats and feminist activists was limited both by political considerations and ideological rifts within the local women's movement itself. Here, ties to western Germany and western German feminists facilitated the movement of distrust of gender mainstreaming from the autonomous women's movement in western Germany to radical feminists especially. Hence, feminists in Erfurt perceive gender mainstreaming as a risk and have not worked to adopt it. For activists and femocrats in Rostock there was little to lose, whereas for those in Erfurt the stakes seemed much higher, given the already precarious perch of the women's movement. The contours of these safe zones were influenced by regional influences and localized understandings of gender under socialism and capitalism.

In order to adopt and organize around a new policy idea, local social movements need an appropriate context of support. The opportunity to engage with a newer policy paradigm that supports movement goals is not sufficient for social movements to mobilize around a policy. A context of support is especially critical if, as in the case of gender mainstreaming, a new policy idea can be interpreted as either an opportunity or as a threat to movement interests. Such supportive contexts include a conjuncture of factors, including movement cohesion and resources, open political opportunity structures and alignment between movement goals and policymakers' goals, and possibilities for learning and/or validation from external actors.

In addition to identifying factors salient for the diffusion of a new policy paradigm within social movements, this comparative analysis also illuminates the range of responses to gender mainstreaming among femocrats and feminist activists working at subnational levels. The concerns about gender mainstreaming activists and local femocrats express largely mirror those feminist scholars identify in the academic literature, with some important omissions and differences in emphasis. Like feminist scholars, activists and femocrats expressed concern that gender mainstreaming could be used as a tool to undermine programs focused exclusively on women and/or women's issues. They also widely noted the complexity of the concept as inhibiting or retarding adoption, even in Rostock. However, none of the respondents in either city expressed any concern about what relationship gender mainstreaming might have to other inequalities, such as those based on race, ethnicity or sexuality. Furthermore, although it would be inaccurate to state that localized actors weren't attuned to, or interested in, the contradictions between gender mainstreaming and various feminist ideologies, there was, relative to the scholarly feminist discourse on gender mainstreaming, less emphasis among these women in general on the feminist politics of gender mainstreaming and greater emphasis on the material and practical implications of gender mainstreaming.

New policy agendas introduced by outside actors interact with local social movements in diverse ways, not all of which have positive outcomes for local movements. In Rostock, the end effect of the EU's introduction of gender mainstreaming has been largely positive, building cohesion within the local feminist movement, providing access to new funding resources, and reinforcing the capacity of femocrats. Gender mainstreaming appears to be on a path of entrenchment in Rostock. On the other hand, gender mainstreaming has dug the wedge between different camps of feminists in Erfurt even deeper, and has made femocrats and activists within the many struggling organizations there feel threatened. Supranational policymakers should work towards greater awareness of the presumably unintended consequences of new policy paradigms. Particularly critical is that EU policymakers must more clearly delineate if and how gender mainstreaming programs will compete with other programs for women and work to demonstrate that gender mainstreaming is complementary, and not competitive, with these programs and services.

13

References

Adams, Melinda and Alice Kang. 2007. "Regional Advocacy Networks and the Protocol on the Rights of Women in Africa." *Politics & Gender* 3: 451-74.

Berry, Frances Stokes and William D. Berry. 1999. "Innovation and Diffusion Models in Policy Research." In *Theories of the Policy Process*, edited by Paul Sabatier. Boulder CO: Westview Press,

Beveridge, Fiona, Sue Nott and Kylie Stephen. 2000. "Mainstreaming and the Engendering of Policy-Making: A Means to an End?" *Journal of European Public Policy* 7,3: 385-405.

Booth, Christine and Cinnamon Bennett. 2002. "Gender Mainstreaming in the European Union: Towards a New Conception and Practice of Equal Opportunities?" *European Journal of Women's Studies* 9,4: 430-46.

Daley, Dorothy M. 2007. "Voluntary Approaches to Environmental Problems: Exploring the Rise of Nontraditional Public Policy." *The Policy Studies Journal* 35,2: 165-80.

Daly, Mary. 2005. "Gender Mainstreaming in Theory and Practice." *Social Politics* 12,3: 433-50.

Einhorn, Barbara. 2000. "Gender and Citizenship in the Context of Democratisation and Economic Reform in East Central Europe." In *International Perspectives on Gender and Democratisation*, edited by Shirin Rai. London: Macmillan, pp. 103-24.

Einhorn, Barbara and Charlotte Sever. 2003. "Gender and Civil Society in Central and Eastern Europe." *International Feminist Journal of Politics* 5,2: 163-90.

Ferree, Myra Marx. 1995. "Making Equality: The Women's Affairs Offices in the Federal Republic of Germany." In *Comparative State Feminism*, edited by Dorothy McBride Stetson and Amy G. Mazur. Thousand Oaks CA: Sage, pp. 95-113.

Greed, Clara. 2004. "Overcoming Factors Inhibiting the Mainstreaming of Gender into Spatial Planning Policy in the United Kingdom." *Urban Studies* 42,4: 719-49.

Group of Specialists on Mainstreaming. 1998. *Gender Mainstreaming: Conceptual Framework, Methodology and Presentation of Good Practice*. Strasbourg Cedex: Council of Europe Publishing.

Guenther, Katja M. 2006. "'A Bastion of Sanity in a Crazy World'": A Local Feminist Movement and the Reconstitution of Scale, Space, and Place in an Eastern German City." *Social Politics* 13,4: 551-75.

Krook, Mona Lena. 2006. "Reforming Representation: The Diffusion of Candidate Gender Quotas Worldwide." *Politics & Gender* 2: 303-27.

Lang, Sabine. 2000. "The NGOization of Feminism: Insitutionalization and Institution Building within the German's Women's Movements." In *Global Feminisms since 1945*, edited by Bonnie G. Smith. London: Routledge, 290-304.

Lombardo, Emanuela and Petra Meier. 2006. "Gender Mainstreaming in the European Union: Incorporating a Feminist Reading?" *European Journal of Women's Studies* 13: 151-66.

Mazey, Sonia. 2001. *Gender Mainstreaming in the EU: Principles and Practice*. London: London European Research Center.

Rees, Teresa. 1998. *Mainstreaming Equality in the European Union*. London: Routledge.

Schmidt, Verena. 2005. *Gender Mainstreaming--an Innovation in Europe?* Opladen: Barbara Budrich Publishers.

Squires, Judith. 2005. "Is Mainstreaming Transformative? Theorizing Mainstreaming in the Context of Diversity and Deliberation." *Social Politics* 12,3: 366-88.

Squires, Judith. 2007. *The New Politics of Gender Equality*. Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan.

Stratigaki, Maria. 2005. "Gender Mainstreaming vs Positive Action." *European Journal of Women's Studies* 12,2: 165-86.

True, Jacqui and Michael Mintrom. 2001. "Transnational Networks and Policy Diffusion: The Case of Gender Mainstreaming." *International Studies Quarterly* 45: 27-57.

Verloo, Mieke. 2005. "Displacement and Empowerment: Reflections on the Concept and Practice of the Council of Europe Approach to Gender Mainstreaming and Gender Equality." *Social Politics* 13,3: 344-65.

Walby, Sylvia. 2005. "Gender Mainstreaming: Productive Tensions in Theory and Practice." *Social Politics* 12,3: 321-43.

Woodward, Alison. 2003. "European Gender Mainstreaming: Promises and Pitfalls of Transformative Policy." *Review of Policy Research* 20,1: 65-88.