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Gender mainstreaming in European employment policies
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This article analyzes how gender mainstreaming is discursively redefined in a neoliberal frame within the European Employment Strategy, and looks at the effect of this on employment practices in Germany. The focus of the article is on new governance tools such as the open method of coordination (OMC) in the European employment strategy and the implementation of gender mainstreaming in Germany. From a theoretical perspective, following studies on governmentality, the European integration process, with its new governance tools like the OMC, can be interpreted in a way that changes our perspective on governance. The European integration process can be analyzed as changing and regulating the mechanisms of governance with technologies such as knowledge and economically oriented political benchmarks which reframe gender policies such as gender mainstreaming in an activating and individualizing strategy. In looking at gender mainstreaming, therefore, the article deals with discourses and governmental programs as technologies of power which steer policies and governance mechanisms towards neoliberal rationalities and practices, thus highlighting the governmental technologies used to consolidate neoliberal policies.

**Keywords:** gender mainstreaming; technologies of government; governmentality; European Employment Strategy (EES); open method of coordination (OMC); Germany

**Introduction**
This article explores the implementation of gender mainstreaming in the European Employment Strategy (EES) in the context of the Strategy’s open method of coordination (OMC). I argue that, on the European level, gender mainstreaming has been programmatically framed within a neoliberal discourse of competitiveness and supply-sided employment policies, and that, taking the case of Germany as an example, it has not so far transformed gender inequality in employment. Following studies on governmentality (Burchell et al. 1991, Dean 1999, Barry et al. 1996), the European integration process can be analyzed as a way to govern a geopolitical region and political situation through various technologies of power (see Haahr and Walters 2005). These technologies can be rationalities of government, knowledge management, or mechanisms of soft power and control, such as peer-review-processes like the open method of coordination and political benchmarking (see Gordon 1991, Haahr 2004). I shall focus on these technologies because they programmatically construct market-related identities and employ discourses of competitiveness, employability and privatization, to govern gender and employment policies. The construction of self-responsible, entrepreneurial identities in the documents of the EES is a result of these governmental technologies, because the aim stated by the European

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Council (2000) to create the most competitive, knowledge-based society in the world by 2010 would only be possible on the basis of, *inter alia*, specifically constructed, gendered, entrepreneurial identities. My main assumption is that gender mainstreaming has therefore only functioned as a strategy to modernize gender relations in employment policies in Germany, and has not lead to more economic equality for women, so far as different studies show (Kurz-Scherf 2004, Wöhl 2007 among others).

A focus on governmental technologies can also show the ambivalent effects these have on individual subjects as citizens on a programmatic, normative level, as well as through the implementation of the so called ‘Hartz Reforms’ in employment policies in Germany, which restructured the employment and social welfare sector as I will show below. Entrepreneurship and employability are the key subjectivating words in this context, because becoming a citizen who is self-responsible for future possible ‘risks’ such as sickness or unemployment is vital for this form of active citizenship (see Cruikshank 1999). Gender equality policies fit well in this context with the EU’s idea of creating a competitive, market-oriented economy, as long as they are framed within the employability discourse and foster diversity rather than gender equality insofar as they regard human potential as an economic resource. From a gender perspective, my question is therefore: which specific norms for gendered subjects are programmatically produced, reorganized and sustained on the European level; and which gender policies have evolved over time in this process? And what effect, if any, has gender mainstreaming had in this context in the case of Germany so far?

In the following section I briefly survey how gender policies were integrated into EU policy and the EU polity within a neoliberal discursive frame and then in the next section analyze the implementation of gender mainstreaming within the OMC in employment policies to finally describe the effects of gender mainstreaming for employment and social policies in Germany in recent years.

**Governing gender policies in Europe**

The European Union represents a mode of governance where problems of security, trade, borders, identities and the market are continuously addressed across national state borders. The European integration process is a historically specific answer to the problems of governance of this area in the post-Second World War period. It is a contested geopolitical space where questions of governance include market competition, the construction of a European citizenship and identity, and the outline and defense of its borders. The governance structures of the EU include the member states, supranational political institutions and a single market, which are embedded in the global political economy (Haahr and Walters 2005). Following the Second World War, the European integration process has always been an economic project to guarantee long term peace and economic prosperity to European countries. It was designed to foster intragovernmental trade between member states. A structural change within the integration process can be dated back to the end of the 1980s, as Ziltener (1999) notes, when the former European Community changed from a stabilizing regime for member states to a regime that would be globally competitive.

This was due to new legislation in the form of the Single European Act of 1986, which was the first major revision of the Treaty of Rome (1957). It introduced consultation procedures and extended qualified majority voting to previously excluded areas to harmonize the political process more quickly. All decisions concerning the Single Market, which was envisaged as coming into being in 1992, could now, in principle at least, be agreed upon faster and more effectively. This structural change affected both polity and politics, leading
to a discursive and structural shift towards market competitiveness, and redefined policy according to neoliberal criteria such as price and monetary stability, supply-side employment policies and the restrictive Maastricht criteria of 1992 which included low inflation rates for the member states and guaranteed price stability (Talani 2004). The Single Market in the fields of capital, goods and services, and the job market, were deregulated, while monetary policies were regulated far more strictly (Jessop 2003). From today’s vantage point, it is remarkable how fast the politics and discourse of competitive deregulation has led to the partial privatization of social systems in the member states since 1992. The core elements of these neoliberal policies included less state intervention, rigid budget restrictions in the member states, a supply-side employment policy and the consolidation of the European financial markets, all of which were accompanied by a partial privatization of social security systems, especially the pension system. A finance-led regime was thus established. In the wake of the Single Market, more competitiveness was made possible for transnational companies by the dissolution of non-tariff barriers to trade. Thus, the mutual recognition of national norms and standards became the main principle in the integration modus (Bornschier 2000).

These economic policies, premised on monetary criteria, were supposed to foster international competitiveness for European companies and to secure flexibility and location advantages. Location advantages for companies are therefore given only if salary–price flexibility is possible. The Single Market, the economic and monetary union and, finally, the financial market integration and successive Treaty revisions made the competitive character of the European Union possible in the 1990s. The assignment of competencies, the reassessment of the European Commission and European Parliament, and extended qualified majority voting increased the importance of the supranational EU polity structure without giving democratic or social-equality oriented forces more capacity to act, or to develop alternative concepts. Jacque Delors, who was president of the European Commission in the late 1980s, still wanted to develop a European social model and bring the social partners to actively agree on social standards. But these ideas never won ground and there was little attempt to actively develop strong and coherent social policies within the EU (Scharpf 1999, 2002). The following Treaties – Amsterdam (1997) and Nice (2003) – subsumed the social policy components into a competitive discourse. This subsuming of social protection into economic integration led to a selectivity in the European integration modus which has since been materially and discursively framed by liberalization and competitiveness.

This political rationality of competitiveness employed by different actors has fostered a hierarchy of markets and political projects in the EU. As a consequence, it has not been possible for social and gender policies to evolve rapidly. The history of the European integration process shows that gender equality policies, such as equal pay for women and men, were only included, in Article 119, in the Treaty of Rome in 1957 because one member state, France, had already committed itself to equal pay. Since France saw its national interests and market competitiveness at stake, equal pay was thus installed in the Treaty of Rome (Hoskyns 1996). The directives and guidelines dealing with gender equality which have been implemented in the European integration process since 1957 were supposed to eliminate inequality and discrimination against women in pay and employment, and define minimal standards for the member states. In a first phase, between 1973 and 1983, active social movements still articulated their interests strongly, and demands for full employment, more and better work, and gender equality at the workplace were put on the political agenda. The European Commission and the European Court of Justice reacted to these demands by interpreting Article 119 widely, and the Commission proposed directives for
its precision (Ostner and Lewis 1995, p. 196). A special commission for the ‘rights of women’ was established and three directives were created at this time. For the most part, these directives or guidelines confined themselves to the field of employment policies, because successful lobbying by member states such as Great Britain, Germany, Denmark and the Netherlands in the 1980s prevented similar directives being created to affect social welfare policies and positive discrimination in a wider context. The implementation of further, binding directives considering gender equality was linked to the development of social policies in the EU, and evolved rather slowly.

Therefore, gender equality policies in the 1970s and 1980s were not intentionally designed to foster gender equality and to reach substantial economic gender equality, but to eliminate any competitive disadvantages member states might have. Article 119 on equal pay was enshrined in primary law from 1957 on, but most member states did not adjust their policies until late in the 1970s (Hoskyns 1996). By 1991 and the advent of the Common Market, the Single European Act and Delors’ presidency, conservative and liberal parties had replaced most social democratic governments in member states. The will to implement social reforms stagnated, and Great Britain was able to vote successfully against the directive on parental leave several times, because decisions required unanimity in the Council of Europe. Gender equality in social policies stagnated because directives proposed by the European Commission did not pass the Council.

A strategy to achieve gender equality in all policy fields rather than just those affecting welfare and employment arrived only with the inclusion of gender mainstreaming in the European Employment Strategy, and with Articles 2, 3 and 13 of the Treaty of Amsterdam, in 1997. In this sense, 1997 was a decisive year in regard to the overall integration of policies on gender, because of the enshrining of gender equality in constitutional primary law for the first time. There is no consensus in gender theory, though, as to whether the EU is a proponent of gender equality or not (see Rossilli 2000, Young 2003, Behning and Sauer 2005, Leyenaar 2004, Walby 2005 among others). On the one hand, the binding directives in employment policies and the anti-discrimination directives from 2000 onwards are seen as a major gain in gender equality; on the other hand, the principle of subsidiarity means that, at the supranational level, EU institutions do not have the competencies that member states have to promote gender equality in the fields of social welfare and employment.

Another important aspect of the promotion of gender equality in employment concerns the form of employment. In the past, most directives dealing with gender issues in employment policy considered only full-time employment, not part-time (Rubery 2002). This only changed in 1997. Women working in part-time jobs therefore could not benefit from these directives until then (Rossilli 1997). Another problem is that most member states do not engage in shifting competencies towards the supranational level because they do not favor this shift in institutional power. This has effects on gender policies as far as they concern not only questions of governance and inclusion, but also financial questions (Hoskyns 2008).

Women’s organizations lobbying for gender mainstreaming therefore had to make a strong case against dominant actors and their interventions to implement more gender-specific directives and guidelines were only finally taken up in the supranational institutional contract of the Amsterdam Treaty of 1997 after a very long process of political bargaining (Hoskyns 2008, Leyenaar 2004, Young 2000). Gender mainstreaming was thus finally anchored in the employment guidelines of the Amsterdam Treaty. At the same time Article 105, in Chapter 2 of the Amsterdam Treaty still gives price stability the highest priority in the political goals of the union. Even though several legally binding directives were created during the 1980s and 1990s to foster gender equality in employment and to secure
reasonable working conditions for women, these cannot be seen as a coordinated social policy (Ostner and Lewis 1995). Given that the OMC is the instrument used to implement employment guidelines since 1997, gender mainstreaming is still only supported by soft law. This leaves gender equality policies dependent on the willingness of the member states to further gender equality in employment and other policy fields through open coordination. Compared to the strict and binding Maastricht criteria, this seems rather ineffectual.

The coordination in these employment guidelines is based on the national action plans of the member states. These were quite vague in the past, and focused largely on the preventive measures against unemployment and enabling policies (employability) for individuals formulated in the first part of the employment chapter, rather than on structural adjustments. The second goal of the employment chapter in the European Employment guidelines, which seeks to foster self-entrepreneurship and the creation of new jobs, focuses mainly on the service sector and how to cut the costs of entrepreneurs (see Ostheim and Zollnhofer 2002). The European Employment Strategy therefore draws on neoliberal individualistic ideas such as self-entrepreneurship, which seek to change the norms of society, such as solidarity, by installing activating individualistic policies in the employment and welfare sector (Bröckling 2007, Wöhl 2008). This discursive re-articulation of the concepts of need, entitlement and ideas of empowerment fostered a change in social welfare and employment policies in Germany, as I will show below. It is not possible to fully articulate demands for gender equality in public discourse; nor are such demands programmatically supported on the European level, where they are discursively included in neoliberal policies of employability and self-entrepreneurship.

In the next sections I shall analyze the ambivalent nature of policymaking such as gender mainstreaming and the open method of coordination in employment policies. Finally, gender mainstreaming cannot just be seen as a victory for women’s lobbies in this setting, or as a gain for gender equality, since the strategy shows ambivalent effects, especially concerning social and employment policies, as I shall explain below.

The case of gender mainstreaming in the open method of coordination

Until gender mainstreaming was implemented, in 1997, the European Court of Justice had been progressive in its statements about the equal rights of women (Falkner 1994, p. 84). The integrative dynamic of EU law helped to modernize the supranational as well as the member state level in these specific cases. In this sense, the European Court of Justice and the European Commission had been successful in promoting the rights of working women and since the mid-1970s had adjusted the legal systems of the member states in this direction (Jünemann and Klement 2005). However, these gender specific policies did not *per se* encompass norms of economic equality; they should rather be interpreted in the context of the market and the competitive compatibility of employed women in EU social and employment policies. For this reason, the EU was very willing to promote the labor mobility of women and to dissolve disadvantages that resulted from their living conditions as care workers. A market- and employment-related rationality on gender equality was thus the result.

Even primary law like the Amsterdam Treaty, as well as the gender mainstreaming guidelines in the European Employment Strategy and the successive anti-discrimination directives from 2000 onwards, have not so far managed to substantially promote material economic equality for women, as the European Commission itself remarks (European Commission 2007a, 2007b, Beveridge and Velluti 2008, Pollack and Hafner-Burton 2008).
Governing with the notion of competitiveness in the EU thus means that neoliberal discourses on self-responsibility, self-entrepreneurship and employability have corresponded well with ideas generated by women’s movements about empowerment and the need to be self-responsible and active in gaining, for example, employment; and this has shifted the responsibility for employment, social welfare and security from the state towards the individual. It has also meant that employability has gained ground in this discourse and pushed women onto the labor market, not solely, but also, into low-wage work (Rubery 2005, Wöhl 2007). Along with this shift of responsibility in social and employment policies from the state to the individual citizen, the European labor market has been restructured and gender and social policies reduced to employability. In documents from the European Commission for example, the number of women integrated into the labor market can be interpreted as the main goal of gender mainstreaming (Hofbauer and Ludwig 2006). As a central indicator of the success that gender mainstreaming has secured, these documents count the number of employed women as shown in best-practice models in the member states. The key aim in these documents can be summarized as the improvement of female human resources and the employability of women leading to an increased employment rate. Thus, the strategy of gender mainstreaming is in line with the European Union’s Lisbon Strategy, which states that the employment rate of women should reach 60% by 2010. By focusing primarily on the integration of women into the labor market, gender inequality is reduced to a question of economic integration once again. It neglects that the labor market itself is already gendered hierarchical (Hofbauer and Ludwig 2006). Economic market rationality is also used in documents from the European Commission as a strategy to frame and solve social problems (see Wöhl 2007, p. 180 ff.). Neither a change in the so called private realm of reproduction nor in the gendered structures of institutions like the labor market are addressed, though.

The innovative potential of gender mainstreaming lies in its wide definition of gender equality: all levels of polity and all policies need to be adjusted towards a gender equality perspective, not just social or employment policy. But this potential is restricted in the EU because there are no legally binding rules or directives for those policy fields such as employment policies which specifically concern women and gender equality. The power of the member states to follow their own national path in social, family and employment policies is guaranteed by the principle of subsidiarity. This is why gender equality policies have only been successful since the 1970s in those policy fields of the member states which are committed to supranational law (Ostner and Lewis 1995).

This interpretation is confirmed by the open method of coordination as a new technology of government in the European Employment Strategy which includes gender mainstreaming. The OMC is a weak mode of governance because it is not based on laws and contract but on mutual recognition, and because it offers framework guidelines rather than regulation by directives or uniform policies (Borrás and Greve 2004). In this sense the OMC can be seen as a new rationality and technology of governing Europe on two grounds: first, it sets out to harmonize European policy by letting the member states design and regulate their resources in welfare policy fields by themselves; and, second, because it is not designed to regulate from the supranational level in the usual way, but to steer policy adjustment from a greater distance (Haahr 2004). The supranational level, in the form of the European Commission and European Council, is charged with conducting this adjustment by installing systematic annual monitoring to report on the progress made in the different policy fields by the member states. Because the methods for achieving this in member states may vary, systematic comparisons are monitored by peer review, analyzing the different practices across member states and finding models of ‘best practice’ by
setting benchmarks. Hence political benchmarking in the OMC is designed to encourage 
member states to compete and compare policies with one another (Jacobsson and Schmid 
2002). Political benchmarking, as used in the OMC, is a *modus operandi* of ‘learning by 
comparing’. Member states of the EU which seem to have successfully raised the 
percentage of the work force, or which have partially privatized their pension systems, can 
be seen as examples of best practice or good governance. This ‘peer-pressure’ is sup-
posed to stimulate other member states to adjust their social welfare systems. This form 
of benchmarking is used as a political decision-making process based on economic results 
in international comparison. Regarding employment policies, effective measures to foster 
employment in the member states within the realm of the OMC have been quite vague. 
They have mostly concentrated on preventive or activating measures regarding employa-
blelity for women (Beveridge and Velluti 2008, Pascual 2008, p. 180, Rubery 2005, p. 404, 
Wöhl 2008). Thus the OMC as soft law exemplifies competitive governmental technolo-
gies, since it restructures a democratic process along the lines of institutional reforms that 
are oriented towards market criteria. Learning by comparing (economic) standards is the 
method of changing the welfare state systems of the member states with the OMC, and this 
strategy of competitiveness is employed at the European level. As Jens Henrik Haahr (2004, 
p. 211) remarks, the OMC is a form of governance that understands power as ‘dispersed 
and multifaceted and . . . governance as involving formalized, institutionalized and informal 
processes of co-coordination and will-formation’. This ‘conduct of conduct’ (Gordon 
1991) defines governance as a rational, calculative process to change policies. This does 
not mean that European employment policies and their technologies always comply ade-
quately with concrete actions or programs in the different welfare arrangements of member 
states, but that they employ different technologies of power: they combine scientific knowl-
edge such as knowledge about gender relations with other technologies of government, 
like empowerment programs, control, peer-review processes and political benchmarking to 
harmonize neoliberal policies. This form of neoliberal governmentality implies that it is 
the economy that becomes the regulating and main principle of the state and its form of 
governance (Gordon 1991). Neoliberalism in this sense, then, is not only an ‘ideological 
discourse or a political reality but most of all a political project that aims to establish a 
social reality that it presumes as already given’ (Bröckling *et al.* 2000, p. 9, my transla-
tion). It is no longer individual freedom, but the freedom of the economy, that comes to 
determine normative human action as self-entrepreneurship or political agency as defined 
by economic benchmarks, and that establishes this new form of economic rationality as the 
main criterion and rationality for governing. These technologies of government also rear-
range gender identities or reproduce heterosexual normative gender orders in varied forms: 
double income earners, for example, are generally still imagined as heterosexual couples.

From a governmentality perspective, not only the OMC but also gender mainstreaming 
in the European Employment Strategy can be viewed as a terrain of technologies of 
power, norms and rationalities. In the documents of the European Commission as well 
as in the European employment guidelines, conceptions and norms of gender rela-
tions are articulated and legitimated in the sense of employability and self-responsible 
entrepreneurship of women and men (Beveridge and Velluti 2008, Pascual 2008, p. 180ff., 
Wöhl 2007, p. 176ff.).

**Gender mainstreaming in Germany**
The way in which governmental rationalities and technologies reshape the social practices 
of collective and individual actors, states and supranational institutions is also exemplified
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in soft law, such as gender mainstreaming. Gender mainstreaming was intended to promote
gender equality, similar to the empowerment strategies fostered by international women’s
movements meeting at the Worlds Women’s Conference in Beijing in 1995, and it was
pushed onto the European agenda in that same year, during the time of the Swedish EU
presidency, by the European Equality Commission. It was intended to be a technology
and strategy that state and supranational actors would use to change the gender regimes
of EU member states. On the one hand, gender mainstreaming was implemented on the
supranational level as a bureaucratic top-down process to govern the gender regimes of the
member states. National administrations should now employ gender mainstreaming as a
reform strategy to change segregated gender orders at all polity levels in every policy field,
and the strategy should be employed by all actors in policymaking (Group of Specialists
on Mainstreaming 1998). On the other hand, gender mainstreaming is also a technology to
develop and disseminate a certain knowledge and expertise about gender at the micro-level
of subjects and individual actors who are concerned with the strategy’s implementation
at the meso-level in their administration, organization, educational institutions, unions,
non-governmental organizations (NGOs), etc. This knowledge about gender and gender
expertise is backed up by gender experts from universities and their scientific knowledge
about gender in the form of gender studies. In this sense gender mainstreaming is used as
a knowledge technology to transfer gender knowledge into state institutions and society in
order to transform these institutions and organizations from within. The responsible staff in
higher positions in these institutions – mostly men therefore – are supposed to acquire and
promote this gender knowledge and transform the institutions and their specific policies
towards gender equality. But as empirical research has shown in Germany, gender main-
streaming is often shifted back to the advocacy of women in non-binding decision-making

Bureaucratic structures in particular often have a long tradition of working against
institutional change. Added to this is the fact that administrative bodies compete with one
another for resources and make it even more difficult to implement gender specific strate-
gies, as Susan Halford (1992) showed in case studies of local administrations in England
long before gender mainstreaming was implemented. Local municipalities in Germany
show the same characteristics today. The individual strategies for, and interpretations of,
gender mainstreaming by responsible staff in higher positions are very important for mak-
ing staff aware of gender stereotypes and gender segregations in their own policy field,
as Iris Peinl et al. (2005) have shown; yet analyzing strategies in a local municipality in
Berlin, these researchers see administrative bodies as being more and more under pressure
to orientate towards the market criteria of an activating state and bureaucratic reforms that
respond to citizens more as clients and customers. This leads to the paradox that the struc-
ture of administrations is modernized in a way that often contradicts the goals of the gender
equality projects that are part of gender mainstreaming (Kahlert 2005).

Administrations rather frame the conditions under which these gender projects and
policies can be implemented in line with the hierarchical gender orders and structures
that exist in their institutions. Although men tend to occupy higher positions in institu-
tions, administrative staffs, as in the case of the Berlin municipality, nonetheless see no
reason why women might be subject to discrimination at their workplace. In other words,
staff tended not to perceive gendered structures in their own workplace. The structures
of the administration show their own powerful institutional dynamic, which often directly
conflicts with gender policies and shows the ambivalence of these policies.

Whether and how the knowledge about gender that is part of gender mainstreaming will
eventually lead to an improved understanding of gender relations and gender segregation,
and how gender mainstreaming is discursively framed in the power structures of institutions, is open to question. Institutional change is by no means guaranteed purely by knowledge about gender relations in institutions. Rather, it falls to the actors involved in implementing gender equality to play a major role in the transformation of gender policies and unequal gender hierarchy structures, as studies on gendered bureaucracy in the past have shown (Cockburn 1991, Witz and Savage 1992). Relying only on the competencies of individuals in this setting is thus ambivalent: expertise may be acquired only to activate the individual subjects in these institutions to generate knowledge processes; but at the same time the subject becomes the main agent for generating policies that the state or supranational institutions are no longer directly accountable for. The latter two levels have shifted responsibility to individual subjects, who may not even have a specific interest in changing institutional hierarchies and policies towards gender equality.

Here, the state, as a complex of institutional practices, rather ‘governs from a distance’ (Rose 2000) by letting individual institutional actors act out institutional strategies. The ‘conduct of conduct’ (Gordon 1991) in the Berlin municipality case is directly employed top-down from the supranational level, and does not rely on direct state intervention but on the individual subject to act out these gender equality policies. Responsibility is shifted to the individuals involved in the implementation process, thereby avoiding complex programs and expensive financial interventions by the state or supranational policies.

This new rationality of governing institutions and individual practices seems only to diffuse power to the individual. State or supranational policies like the European Employment guidelines only gain their effectiveness through these individual actors in the various institutions (Haahr 2004, Wöhl 2008). This way of governing is thus a new rationality and governmental technique employed in this specific historical situation of neoliberal governmentality, where it is the individual who becomes responsible for implementing state strategies in the field of gender equality policies.

This means that the innovation that gender mainstreaming entails in gender equality policies has now become, paradoxically, part of the power field and structure of the governmental strategies which it needs to transform and which have historically created gender segregations. This implies that gender mainstreaming will go no further than equality policies and quotas have in the past. The grassroots’ knowledge of a social movement is now part of the institutional power structures in a top-down process and has to situate itself in this discursive arena of institutions and actors and show its credibility within neoliberal market conditions to have any chance of receiving recognition (see Schild 2003). This shows that a gender equality project like gender mainstreaming, which was intended to change institutions from within, has been incorporated and discursively neutralized in so far as it must now show its effectiveness within neoliberal market rationality and its capacity to change and criticize it from within. But neither the rationality of the liberalized market nor its actions and possibilities to create gender equality, for example in the employment sector, has been substantially questioned in this context until now.

Barbara Stiegler, one of the German proponents of a social democratic think-tank lobbying for gender mainstreaming, sees gender mainstreaming as a chance to shape and influence innovation processes in state administrations. Gender as category could now not only be seen as a variable and statistical component, but ‘in its varied capacity for shaping gender relations’ (Stiegler 2005, p. 33, my translation). Each administration process could now be steered by a so-called ‘SMART’ principle, where ‘each process is specific (S), measurable (M), attractive (A), realistic (R), and adjusted in time (T) to analyze organizational processes in relation to the gender order they imply’ (Stiegler 2005, p. 33, my translation). From a governmentality perspective, this is surely not only a chance, but also...
a technology of governmental power which refers to an economic rationality in the sense of political benchmarking. If gender mainstreaming is only possible in a given set of calculable market criteria, it is already framed in a market discourse and may be restricted in its empowering possibilities to provoke changes towards gender equality. This means that it can be strategically relevant to relate to the market logic of neoliberalism; but it shows the ambivalence – empowering the individual and simultaneous governmental rule – and therefore the powerful discourse around gender mainstreaming in Germany so far.

Knowledge is also a key to governing ‘from a distance’ (Rose 2000) by changing, for example, employment and social benefit programs into empowerment programs where each person is personally responsible for their loss of paid work and where the state no longer interferes (Cruikshank 1999). This has happened in Germany, where the so-called ‘Hartz Commission’, named after former Volkswagen chief executor for employees, Peter Hartz, was installed by the former Social Democratic and Green government to restructure the whole employment and welfare sector. Economists, managers and union members designed a policy program called Hartz I – IV. Besides designing an activating employment sector that is based on supply-related employment policies and redesigning the federal employment agencies, the Hartz Commission recommended the shortening of unemployment payments to one year. After that year, if the person has not found a job, the unemployment benefit is the same as the social welfare benefit. People who have been long-term unemployed are also forced to take up jobs at one Euro per hour in addition to social welfare, if they do not want to lose these benefits. These methods are supposed to stimulate or activate especially the long-term unemployed to find a job. But given the rate of unemployment, around 7% in Germany, the difficulty of finding a job is part of a structural problem, and not just a personal one. The effects on gender relations in Germany of these reforms result from the adding together of incomes from spouses and cohabitees (female and male) within one dwelling if they live together as cohabitees: the income a cohabitee receives will be taken into account in calculating the welfare benefits a welfare recipient receives. This form of social welfare policy in Germany extends and modernizes former measures which particularly supported heterosexual families and married couples; but at the same time it relies on private households to maintain themselves, since the German welfare state no longer guarantees to do this (Riedmüller 2004). In this sense, the German welfare state at the same time modernizes gender relations, by acknowledging homosexual couples, while withdrawing from its former welfare system towards individual responsibility. These ambivalent welfare policies put responsibility for social welfare in the hands of private households and the individual subject as citizen. It is in this context that this form of governance calls on the responsible citizen to take unpaid community work, and activates the unemployed to work, for example in homes for elderly people, at one Euro per hour if they cannot find other work. These policies are fostering changes in the welfare state system and do not necessarily rely on a conservative gender identity. Different gender identities comply well with the individualistic idea of the personal responsibility of women in this neoliberal rationality, whether it is a single mother working in a highly qualified job or a married migrant woman working in the low paid service sector (Pühl and Wöhl 2002). Gender mainstreaming will have to change these policies from within, if it wants to go beyond formal gender equality policies or just ameliorating working conditions for middle class women. Unfortunately, there are no binding legal procedures within gender mainstreaming policies to ensure that it has this effect (BWA Jahresbericht 2002). In Germany, women work especially in the low-paid household-related service sector and gender mainstreaming has not diminished the income divide between women and men in employment so far (Stolz-Willig 2004). Collective wage agreements (Flächentarifverträge)
are also being allowed to expire and working hours are being increased in the service sector and community hospitals, both areas in which women represent a high percentage of the workforce (Kurz-Scherf 2004). Gender mainstreaming, therefore, is compatible with an activating employment policy in Germany and has not so far changed the historically established division of work and income between women and men. This does not imply that gender mainstreaming has had no positive effects at all: it may well discursively support gender budgeting measures and show positive effects in institutions in the long run. But the existing changes in employment and welfare policies in Germany have yet to confirm this.

Conclusions

As described, the European integration process offers an ambivalent picture concerning gender equality policies. This results from a selective integration of gender policies into the supranational institutional power structures of the EU and from a constitutional asymmetry (Scharpf 2002) between economic and monetary union on the one hand and social policies on the other. A competitive market economy and neoliberal competitive discourse has been reinforced and has integrated gender equality policies only in so far as they are compatible with employability and a competitive discourse. In this sense, neoliberal governmental technologies have been able to rearticulate gender mainstreaming within a neoliberal strategy, reducing gender equality to a question of the employability of women on the labor market. Furthermore, a neoliberal rationality has been used to (re-)produce gendered, normative entrepreneurial conceptions of subjectivity. Studies on governmentality have shown how new technologies of government evolved which employ specific discourses on economic knowledge and benchmarks to adjust the systems of the member states so that they fit into a neoliberal discursive frame. Gender equality strategies and actors have not so far been able to challenge these neoliberal discourses and the resulting policies in a way that has led to increased economic gender equality. Even gender knowledge as provided by gender mainstreaming has not so far substantially fostered gender equality in employment policies, and has proved compatible within the neoliberal market rationality of employability in Germany.

Foucault’s conception of governmentality as a theoretical perspective can shed light on these ambivalences and the ensemble of techniques used to construct and govern gender policies. More research would be necessary to analyze the specific discourses, strategies, norms and political truths which are created in this process of governing Europe as the European Union, and to compare how gender equality policies like gender mainstreaming are actually implemented in the different policy fields of the member states.

In this article I have focused on political programs, highlighting the rationality which lies behind them. By doing so, I have explicitly focused on the level of rationalities and normative discursive subject formations – but not how gender relations, gender policies, gender specific guidelines and gendered subjectivities are actually lived. For this, more empirical studies would be needed in order to find answers to the question of whether and how people re-write these discursive rationalities and programs in their everyday life.

Notes on contributor

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Notes

1. See for further detail on Foucault’s late conception of governmentality (Foucault 1991).
3. See for a detailed description of all directives installed in the different phases of the integration process which would go beyond the intention of this article until the implementation of gender mainstreaming Ostner and Lewis (1995) and Fuhrmann (2005), who have written extensively on this topic.
5. See for example the well known case of Defrenne II vs. Sabena in which the Belgian stewardess Mrs Defrenne went to court against Sabena because they did not employ women over the age of 40 years on flights, but allowed men above this age as stewards on flights (Ostner and Lewis 1995).
6. Hofbauer and Ludwig analyzed main documents of the European Commission concerning social and employment policies such as the following: Community framework strategy on gender equality 2001–2005 (European Commission 2000a), The Social Agenda (European Commission 2000b), and the report on equal opportunities (European Commission 2002), see for more detail Hofbauer and Ludwig (2006).

References


