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ANOTHER VELVET REVOLUTION?
GENDER MAINSTREAMING AND
THE POLITICS OF IMPLEMENTATION

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A framework for the analysis of gender mainstreaming

Gender mainstreaming is seen by many as an attempt at innovation in gender equality policies, an attempt to overcome the limitations of previous gender equality strategies. Sonia Mazey puts it that "gender mainstreaming constitutes a clear example of policy succession or policy adaptation, prompted by the desire to overcome the limitations of existing policies, and need to respond to a changed policy environment". (Mazey 2000: 3) Mazey is just cited here as one exponent of the common understanding of gender mainstreaming as a "new" and more promising, transformative, even "revolutionary" strategy (see also: Hafner-Burton & Pollack 2000: 3; Rees 1998; Rees 2000).

This presentation of gender mainstreaming as an innovation needs a closer look. What is the reference point? Gender mainstreaming is better than what? Newer than what? The usual reference point is what is called specific (one could also say targeted) equality policies. In order to answer the questions above, not only a more detailed description of gender mainstreaming in relation to these other strategies is needed, but also a theoretical framework

that allows to assess the quality of policies. What is better? What is better in terms of gender equality? Before analysing concrete Dutch experiences with gender mainstreaming, this paper gives theoretically based answers to these questions, so that the implications of the claim that it is a new and better gender equality strategy can be clarified. But first a more general introduction to this strategy is needed.

What is gender mainstreaming?

There are several definitions of gender mainstreaming[1]. The definition of the Group of specialists on gender mainstreaming at the Council of Europe has been widely adopted because it accentuates gender equality as an objective, and not women as a target group, and because it emphasizes that gender mainstreaming is a strategy. This definition says that: "*Gender mainstreaming is the (re)organisation, 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 policy-making.* (Council of Europe 1998: 15)".

   The essential element in this definition of the strategy of gender mainstreaming is its accent on what needs to be changed, targeting policy processes as the main change object. Gender mainstreaming, according to this definition is about (re)organising procedures and routines, about (re)organising responsibilities and capacities for the incorporation of a gender equality perspective. In further elaborations of the strategy, different tactics that are distinguished can concentrate on organising the use of gender expertise in policy-making, or on organising the use of gender impact analyses in this process, or on organising consultation and participation of relevant groups and organisations in the process[2]. Additionally, the accent in gender mainstreaming is on gender, not only – more narrowly – on "women" as a target group.

   The underlying assumption is that most regular policies are gendered, that regular policies are a major constitutional element in the construction of gendered social institutions, and that

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1   The UN definition is: "Mainstreaming a gender perspective is the process of assessing the implications for women and men of any planned action, including legislation, policies or programmes, in all areas and at all levels. It is a strategy for making women's as well as men's concerns and experiences an integral dimension of the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes in all political, economic and societal spheres so that women and men benefit equally and inequality is not perpetuated. The ultimate goal is to achieve gender equality." (Source: Mainstreaming the gender perspective into all policies and programmes in the United Nations system, ECOSOC July 1997. Chapter IV.) The essential differences with the Council of Europe definition are the accent on men and women versus on gender, and the accent in the latter definition on the necessity of a sustainable transformation of policy processses, to avoid incidental, or even accidental attention for gender.

2   See the report of the Group of Specialists on Mainstreaming, Part II.

gendered social institutions are an important component in the continuous reconstruction of gender inequality. Gender mainstreaming usually involves a reorganisation of policy processes, because existing procedures and routines are all too often gender-blind or gender-biased. In contrast to the standard assumption of policy makers and policy-making organisations that their work is gender-neutral, it has been proven over and over again that gender differentials are not recognised in regular policies, and that unreflected assumptions include (most often unintentional) biases in favour of the existing unequal gender relations (Verloo & Roggeband 1996; Siim 1988).

Gender mainstreaming as a strategy is meant to actively counteract this gender bias, and to use the normal mandate of policy makers to promote more equitable relations between women and men (Verloo 2000: 13). It addresses "systems and structures themselves – those very institutionalised practices that cause both individual and group disadvantage in the first place" (Rees 2000: 3). Because of this focus on a systems approach, "it has much more potential to have a serious impact upon gender equality than other strategies have (Rees 2000).

Let's have a closer look at the other approaches or strategies in gender equality policies that are frequently distinguished: equal treatment in legislation, and specific or targeted equality policies (Rees 1998; Nelen & Hondeghem 2000). *Equal treatment in legislation* is focused on providing equal access, and correcting existing inequalities in legislation, so that individual citizens are formally equal. This strategy is framed within a liberal discourse, where it is up to individual citizens to then use their formal equal rights. The starting point for the strategy of *specific or targeted gender equality policies* is the recognition that equal rights cannot always be used by all citizens to the same extent, because of persistent gender inequalities that exist at the level of society. This strategy aims at creating conditions that will result in equality in outcome, to counterbalance the unequal starting positions of men and women in most societies. Most often specific measures aim at mitigating unequal conditions and facilitate equality for (specific groups of) women. These measures are usually taken by specialised state institutions, mainly by gender equality agencies[3]. Positive action and positive discrimination, in the sense of a preferential treatment for women, can be part of this last approach. *Gender mainstreaming* addresses the problem of gender inequality at a more structural level, identifying gender biases in current policies, and addressing the impact of these gender biases in the reproduction of gender inequality. By reorganising policy processes so that the regular policy makers will be obliged and capable to incorporate a perspective of gender equality in their policies, this strategy aims at a fundamental transformation, eliminating gender biases, and redirecting policies so that they can contribute towards the goal

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[3]   There are many terms that are used to describe these institutions. Stetson & Mazur (1995) follow the UN definition in using the term "women's policy machineries". In this paper the choice for the term gender equality agencies has been made mainly to accentuate that the problem addressed by these institutions can be gender inequality and not only the position of women. As Stetson & Mazur point out, there is a huge variety in these institutions, and there is no easy categorization of the varying way that they are organised and positioned in the overall governmental structures.

of gender equality. Gender equality agencies still have a role, mainly as think tanks and facilitators.

The difference between the three strategies hence involves differences in diagnosis, in the attribution of causality, in prognosis and in the resulting call for action. (see table 1)[4].

Table 1: Different approaches in gender equality policies

STRATEGY	DIAGNOSIS	ATTRIBUTION OF CAUSALITY	PROGNOSIS	CALL FOR ACTION
	What is wrong?	Who/what is responsible for the problem?	What should be done?	Who should do something?
Equal treatment	Inequality in law, different laws/ rights for men and women	Individual responsibilities	Change the laws towards formally equal rights for men and women in laws	Legislators
Specific equality policies	Unequal starting position of men and women. Group disadvantage of women. Specific problems of women that are not addressed. Lack of access, skills, or resources of women	Diverse, both at individual level, and at structural level	Design and fund specific projects to address the problems of (specific groups of) women	Gender equality agencies, sometimes together with established institutions
Gender mainstreaming	Gender bias in regular policies and social institutions resulting in gender inequality	Policy makers (unintentionally)	(Re) organize policy processes to incorporate a gender equality perspective in all policies	Government /all actors routinely involved in policy making

Lost memories and the presentation of gender mainstreaming as new

It is clear that gender mainstreaming is presented as new, as revolutionary even. Why is that? And: is it true? Or: is that the only story?

One could easily defend the position that gender mainstreaming is not a new strategy[5]. In fact, countries like Canada and the Netherlands were among the first, in the middle of the 70s, at the beginning of the development of gender equality policies, to stress the importance of trying to effect change by fully integrating women and their policy concerns throughout the policy process. These are the Canadian wordings (Geller-Schwartz 1995). The Netherlands started equality policies from the beginning as a two-track policy, aiming simultaneously at

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4   These elements are borrowed from Snow et all 1986.

5   Mainstreaming was first developed as a concept in the fields of education and development. For an account of early attempts at educational mainstreaming see Wilcox & Wigle 1997.

producing specific targeted policies (called sector policies), and what was called facet policy, the integration of the emancipation of women as a facet of all general policies (Outshoorn 1995; Verloo 2000). Both in Canada and the Netherlands, the integration of gender equality in general policies proved to be much more troublesome than was expected, not in the least because of a lack of political will, and a bureaucratic wall of indifference, if not hostility. It would be interesting to make a more extensive study of these and other early and failed efforts to realise an integrative gender equality approach.

It is also interesting to know that an earlier attempt of the (UN) Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women to recommend a similar strategy hardly got any attention. I am referring to Resolution 42/60 that "recommends that State parties establish and strengthen effective national machinery, institutions and procedures at a high level of government, and with adequate resources, commitment and authority to (among other things) advise *on the impact on women of all government policies* (Italics MV) ". The problem with the CEDAW recommendation is similar to the problems that were faced earlier by Canada and the Netherlands. While the recommendation includes a clear statement that many or even all policies have a relevance to gender, and the goal of integrating a gender perspective into all gender relevant polices is adopted, it remains absolutely vague how this goal can be reached. The call for action is not articulated in terms of actors, responsibilities and activities.

With reference to the early experiences of the Netherlands, Canada and CEDAW, it can be concluded that gender mainstreaming is not really new. Its diagnosis, attribution of causality, prognosis and call for action can be found in a less articulated form in the early attempts at integration. Moreover, in this earlier form the strategy seems to have been seriously unsuccessful.

What is new however in the past years (since the World Conference on Women in Beijing 1995), is both the strong political support for this strategy, and a more precise definition and clarification of the strategy, along with a proliferating development of new instruments. Since the World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995, the political support for gender mainstreaming has improved substantially. Together with the Platform for Action, the idea of gender mainstreaming, of "taking into account the impact on gender before decisions are taken" has been diffused widely, and a whole world wide process of further developing this strategy has started[6]. All member states of the European Union, and the European Commission have now adopted the strategy.

This increased political support, especially in Western Europe, has been attributed to changed political opportunities, notably the entrance of Scandinavian states to the European

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[6]   For a description of the diffusion of gender mainstreaming in international organisations see: Hafner- Burton & Pollack 2000.

Union, to strong mobilising of feminist groups facilitated by UN Women's Conferences, and to strategical framing, one could say "selling" of this strategy (Hafner-Burton & Pollack 2000).

The answer to my question whether gender mainstreaming is a new strategy is both yes and no. Most importantly, it is clear that gender mainstreaming has been presented as new, and that its presentation as new is essential in explaining its success... In another paper, I have shown that the Council of Europe report on gender mainstreaming uses the "newness" of the strategy as a marketing argument (Verloo 1998). This argument was successful, obviously. One could say that the strategical framing of gender mainstreaming as new has been one of the ways in which the waning attention for gender equality has been reactivated.

A better strategy?

Along with this presentation of gender mainstreaming as new, goes a frame that portrays gender mainstreaming as a better strategy, especially in comparison with specific gender equality policies. I cite from a report of the DAC Expert Group on Women in Development (Schalkwyk & Woroniuk 1997): "Gender mainstreaming responds to a dissatisfaction with the major emphasis on separate projects for women. Although these projects were innovative and catalytic, most were small isolated initiatives that made minimal contributions to changing gender inequalities." In contrasting descriptions of gender mainstreaming and specific policies, gender mainstreaming appears as a strategy that can get gender equality out of the ghetto of "women's projects".

The contrast between specific policies and gender mainstreaming is typical of many texts. In this contrasting comparison, gender mainstreaming is always the "better" strategy. In non-academic texts that can be seen as part of the propaganda material for this strategy (such as how-to manuals), this comparison is most often combined with a reassurance that gender mainstreaming will not mean that specific equality policies will be unnecessary. Both strategies are then presented as complementary, as a twin track[7].

What can be said about this comparison? And what can be said about the presentation of gender mainstreaming as a better, yet complimentary strategy? Let's first have a look why it is considered a better strategy. At first sight, there might seem to be a contradiction between the failure of earlier attempts at integrating a gender perspective in all policies, and the optimism that surrounds gender mainstreaming. I mentioned already that there have been earlier attempts at integration of gender equality in general policies in a number of countries (notably Canada, New Zealand, the Netherlands and Norway) that were not successful.

If I zoom in on the experiences in the Netherlands, it becomes clear that (at least for the period 1975 till 1995) successes in gender equality policies have been reported almost exclusively in specific policies (consider policies to counter violence against women and to offer support to women who are victims of sexual violence, or projects concerning women's participation on the job market). Facet policy (the name used in the Netherlands for policies that integrate emancipation in regular policies) has always been a problem child in this period, because it has been very rare for departments to put equality high on their agendas, because the problem definition in practice has been limited to "women lagging behind men", and because there have been few instruments with which to shape and implement this policy (Keuzenkamp & Teunissen, 1990; Verloo & Roggeband, 1994; Outshoorn 1995). In fact, facet policy was a more or less embryonic policy, since only the goal (integration) was clear, but elaborations in terms of strategy, prerequisites and tools were absent. Moreover, as in many countries, the existing equality infrastructure was often too weak to influence departments to incorporate aspects of gender equality in their policies (McBride-Stetson & Mazur, 1995).

From the Dutch example, it seems that the earlier negative experiences can be attributed for a large part to the conceptual confusion about the strategy, to a weak political and bureaucratic support, and to the lack of concrete tools and instruments to implement the strategy. I will come back to more recent Dutch practices with gender mainstreaming in the second part of my paper, where I will concentrate on the experiences with the Gender Impact Assessment instrument. At this point, it is sufficient to mention that it is definitively too early for a claim that gender mainstreaming is a better strategy on the basis of an empirical assessment of gender mainstreaming experiences. There is simply not enough material yet for an empirical evaluation.

Therefore, the claim that gender mainstreaming is better at this point in time must be based not on an evaluation of this strategy, but on an assessment of its potential to be a more comprehensive strategy than other available strategies, because of its diagnosis, which includes an accent on gender combined with its accent on the institutional level. Besides, now that the conceptual confusion has diminished, political support has grown, and more instruments are being developed, there is reason to assume that the earlier negative experiences can be overcome, and even a further development of the strategy can be expected. Evaluation of these practices will show if the potential of gender mainstreaming is really there, and if this potential can be realised.

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7   This claim is probably accurate, but it is beyond the scope of this paper to discuss this in more detail.

Another velvet revolution?

Let's now first examine the claim of authors such as Hafner-Burton & Pollack, who see gender mainstreaming as a (potentially) revolutionary strategy, in a more theoretical way. Why is gender mainstreaming considered to be a revolutionary strategy? And: what kind of a revolution would that be?

In the initial discussions on gender mainstreaming after Beijing, not only advocates of gender mainstreaming raised their voice. Antagonists warned of the danger that this might be the end of gender equality policies. The dangers described were sometimes linked to the early experiences with a strategy of integration. In the Netherlands, the experiences at the local level are revealing. There the idea that gender equality should be integrated "everywhere", had the sad consequence that all gender equality offices were closed, because gender equality was now to be "the responsibility of everyone". Such a vague attribution of responsibilities, without any sanctions, of course had no result whatsoever, but the predictable result has been the nearly total disappearance of gender equality policies at the local level.

Warnings also came from the field of development policies where attempts at "integrating women in development" had proven to be all but revolutionary[8]. In fact, the result of these policies often was to offer women a place within an agenda that was designed along traditional lines. Gender issues, or attention for women were then build into existing paradigms. Women had to twist themselves into even more stereotypical and unequal life positions than before to fit into those paradigms, and the mainstream was not changed at all.

Gender mainstreaming is certainly not an automatically revolutionary strategy, one can conclude. Just as other strategies for gender equality, and maybe any policy, it can easily be perverted[9]. The main dangers identified so far are the danger of disappearance of gender equality policies altogether, and the danger of being swept away by the mainstream instead of changing it.

This is not to deny that gender mainstreaming is a potentially revolutionary strategy. The main reason that it is being called revolutionary is because it explicitly aims at being transformative. With its accent on (re)organising policies, and its assumption that all policies are gendered, this approach implies the transformation of the existing policy agenda in favour of gender equality. Yet, the dangers involved seem real enough too, closely connected to the strategy, and possibly contra-productive.

A closer analysis of the dynamics of the transformation involved is necessary. The most essential element then seems to be that this transformation cannot take place by using force or

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[8] This is known as the "integration debate". See Esther Boserup (1970, Women's Role in Economic Development New York: St. Martin's Press.

[9] For a clear analysis of the pervertion of positive action see: Outshoorn 1991.

violence. Therefore, it cannot be a classic revolution. In order to better understand what kind of a revolution it then might be, we need to zoom in on the definition of gender mainstreaming and on further elaborations of the definition.

As it is defined, the transformative strategy of gender mainstreaming claims the involvement and even the co-operation of the regular actors, those who are routinely involved in policy making. This element is crucial in understanding both the promises and the hazards of gender mainstreaming. In the process of introducing gender mainstreaming these actors are handled with care. When we take a look at the parts of the report of the Council of Europe where these actors are addressed, for example, it becomes clear how this is taken into account. Nowhere is the report critical of these actors, they are never blamed, their mistakes are labelled "unintentional", and great care was taken to explain to them how using the strategy of gender mainstreaming will be in favour of their own goals, and will result in policies that are of better quality.

In more theoretical terms: because the regular actors have to implement the strategy, it is unavoidable to frame the strategy and all its elements in terms that are meaningful and positive to them. Newly proffered frames (such as gender mainstreaming in this case) must "resonate" or "fit" with the existing frames within which the regular actors, or the dominant elite among those actors, operate. In order to be taken on board, they have to resonate with the values and norms currently adopted by regular actors. Many typical examples of this can be found in the Council of Europe report on gender mainstreaming, for instance where it is explained that gender mainstreaming will improve the lives of all people, that it will lead to better government, that it involves both women and men, and that it takes into account the diversity among women and men. All these are examples of strategical framing[10].

This type of strategical framing is called frame extension, or frame bridging (Snow & Benford 1986). Frame bridging is when a link is constructed with an existing frame, and frame extension is when the boundaries of an existing frame are widened, so that they obtain a broader meaning. In these types of strategical framing, the attempt is to seduce the target audience (politicians, civil servants) by talking their language, by connecting to their goals and their values. Strategical framing is a delicate process. One tries to modify their discourse by expanding it, one tries to play a different reality using their script.

When I refer to gender mainstreaming as a velvet revolution, it is to accentuate this process of seduction.

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10 Hafner-Burton & Pollack describe similar cases of strategical framing within the European Commission (Hafner-Burton & Pollack 2000).

Of course such a strategy is not without danger. Strategical framing is a rhetorical strategy, and one can easily get trapped in rhetoric. The current definition of the Council of Europe can be seen as an attempt to avoid the rhetorical entrapment that occurred in the first embryonic attempts at the integration of a gender perspective in the seventies. Its accent on the reorganisation of policy processes is grounded in these experiences where gender equality agencies were abolished, nobody else was responsible for gender equality, and routines and procedures remained unchanged. This accent can be seen as an attempt to present a more solid frame where the essence of the strategy is clearer and therefore easier to defend.

It would be quite naïve however to expect that this was the last "battle". In order to be able to bridge between a frame of gender equality and any regular policy frame, one has to get under their skin, understand their perspective, and connect to their values and norms. Rhetorical entrapment will always remain a risk in strategies that involve strategic framing. In other words: it will always be necessary to be alert not to be swept away by the mainstream.

To enhance our understanding of the risks involved, a closer look at the dynamics of rhetorical action is useful. Rhetorical action (defined as the strategic use of arguments[11]) follows some rules, described by Schimmelfemming as: a need to appear convincing, and a resulting preference in favour of obscuring or hiding inconvenient facts or norms and against lying or direct contesting; a difficulty in changing points of view; and a requirement of consistency (Schimmelfenning 1999: 28-29). These rules result in limitations for the use of rhetorical action. If gender mainstreaming to a certain extent involves rhetorical action, then it is obvious, to give just one example, that its framing at the time of its introduction will necessarily set the terms for its further development possibilities.

So far I have addressed the notions that gender mainstreaming is a new, or better, or even revolutionary strategy. My conclusion has been that this strategy is a potentially very powerful one, but that it is certainly not an unproblematic one. It is most crucial therefore to have a closer look at the implementation process of gender mainstreaming. What is realised? What is going on? Before I take this closer look however, I want to take a short excursion into policy theories. What can policy theories offer? Do they have theoretical notions that are useful in answering these questions? Which theoretical frameworks to analyse gender mainstreaming are available? Which frameworks are most appropriate?

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[11] Schimmelfenning's definition of rhetorical action is quite close to the concept of strategical framing, when he describes it as: "choosing arguments that are both suitable to the actors claims, and promising to resonate well with their particular audience" (p.28).

Theoretical approaches to the assessment of the quality of policies[12]

Is it possible to assess the quality of policies or strategies at all? What has policy theory to say about the potentialities or success chances of policies in general, and of gender mainstreaming specifically?

Policy theory shows many parallels with other social science disciplines. The early approaches were dominated by a genuine belief in scientific rationality as a key to solving collective problems. Policymaking itself was largely interpreted as solving problems in society. This early science-politics nexus led to an increasing scientization of politics, and to privileged access to political decision-making through advisory positions for academics. One of the results has been that public and political debate has become dominated by purely pragmatic, managerial or administrative arguments. Or, more precisely, by arguments that are presented as such. On the whole, these approaches have a depoliticising effect (Fraser 1989). In these approaches a pragmatist view of politics prevails: politics is seen as a dialogue between expert opinion and the opinion of a larger public, in a community united by the quest for answers for shared problems. The policy scientist is then supposed not to replace political debate, but to (re)invigorate and systematize the debates. Policy science is seen as a service to democracy (Lasswell & Lerner 1951; Lasswell 1971).

Later approaches claimed to be able to explain the emergence of policy problems and to predict the impacts of policy interventions with a better knowledge of causation and application of scientific logic in decision-making. The more sophisticated branches in these rational approaches saw a policy's content as a hypothesis, and the implementation as an experiment[13]. Policy science could then compare the impact of different interventions to create knowledge. The main problem of these lines of thinking is obviously that they are based on the assumption that there is one standard of appraisal to judge these experiments. And, that there is consensus over the problems that need to be solved too.

As a result of these – all too familiar - crises of rationalist and technocratic approaches, policy science took a post-positivist turn. Some of the currents developed since are extremely relativistic, in that they see policy analysts as "condemned to provide argumentative ammunition for the rhetorical struggle of politicians" (Weiss 1991). More optimistic currents see policy science as a balancing act in which the policy analyst helps both politicians and citizens to find a practical middle ground between the ever-present tensions of resources, constraints, dogma and scepsis (Wildavsky 1979/87).

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[12]   This paragraph has profited significantly from Robert Hoppe's historical overview of policy sciences (Hoppe 1999).

[13]   Hoppe (1999) puts analycentric, neo-positivist and critical-rationalist approaches in this category.

A further development was to concentrate on the (political) conditions for consensus formation. This accent is combined with a normative perspective that sees the policy analyst as the main figure in the process of monitoring consensus formation (Forester 1985; 1989; Dryzek 1990; 1993). Hence, there is a tendency in this approach to downplay divergent opinions. A more discursive approach sees policymaking as "a continuous construction of goals and means in intelligent deliberation and political argument, in a process of 'naming and framing'". (Schön 1983)

Although there are different views on the future of policy science theory, it seems that there is a split between the more discursive and more structural or rational approaches, and it is unlikely that this split will be overcome soon. My rudimentary sketch of developments in policy science (based mainly on Hoppe 1999) shows business as usual: competing paradigms, combined with an ongoing tendency to downplay the political dimensions of policy making. As policy science has been informing policy making, we can expect to find traces of the mentioned paradigms in the practices of policy making itself, and we can use them to describe more precisely different practices of gender mainstreaming. For a framework for the analysis of gender mainstreaming to be satisfactory however, we would need exactly the combination of discursive and structural approaches that is still missing in policy science. For it is clear that discursive processes are important in gender mainstreaming, and at the same time, it would be extremely naïve to thrust aside attention for the structural political context in a more classical sense.

Theoretical approaches to assess the emergence and quality of gender mainstreaming

In light of the overview given in the previous paragraph, it should come as no surprise that the analytical framework that has been used recently to analyse gender mainstreaming comes from another branch of social science (Hafner-Burton & Pollack 2000). In this framework - borrowed from social movement theory - which can be seen as the result of a coming together of different schools in social movement theory, a combination of political opportunities, mobilising networks, and strategical framing is used to explain the rise (and fall) of social movements, their successes, and their failures (Tarrow 1998). Its advantage is precisely this integration of an accent on the discursive dimension with more classic accents on institutions and power relations. If one wants to study the implementation of gender equality policies as a political process, then this theoretical framework from social movement theory seems to be more comprehensive than most policy theory frameworks.

The concept of *political opportunitie*s in social movement theory refers mostly to the openness of the political and the administrative arena to actors seeking change, to the existence of allies within the political and bureaucratic system, and to the absence of major

political cleavages. Applied to the understanding of gender equality policies, the main hypothesis is that a new strategy such as gender mainstreaming will only have a chance when certain political opportunities are present. The better the opportunities, the easier its introduction, acceptance and implementation will be. Parallel to results from social movement analysis, it can also be expected that specific sets of political opportunities can shape both the form and content of gender mainstreaming.

The concept of *mobilising networks* refers to the groups and networks that already exist, and that can be a starting point for the formation of other groups, or that can put pressure on the system. In the use of this concept for the analysis of gender mainstreaming, the main accent has been on the role of these networks as pressure groups. The other element, the use of existing networks to build productive networks for gender mainstreaming, has not received much attention yet, but it could be very valuable for the analysis of the politics of implementation of this strategy (especially for a better understanding of the choice of actors that are involved in actually doing gender mainstreaming).

The concept of *strategical framing* refers to "the strategic efforts of people to fashion shared understandings that legitimate and motivate action towards a goal (here gender equality)". As described in previous paragraphs, strategic framing attempts at constructing a fit or a resonance between existing frames and the frame of the change agent. Strategical framing not only is essential for the acceptance of a policy or strategy, but it also channels its implementation in certain directions. Because of the rule of consistency, departure from earlier adopted frames is relatively difficult.

Not just a technical problem: gender mainstreaming and the politics of implementation

Since 1995, there has been a huge demand for manuals on gender mainstreaming, and more specifically for instruments of gender mainstreaming. I cannot recount the number of times that I have been asked to send the precise instructions for the Dutch Gender Impact Assessment, to Germany, or Italy, or Malta, or Ireland. There is always an element of disappointment when I have to explain that it is indeed possible to send a precise description, but that I have to warn against too high expectations, because this instrument has been carefully designed to the Dutch context. Therefore, I am not sure if it can be exported and adopted elsewhere so easily.

The assumptions behind these demands are rooted in a technocratic perspective in policymaking; they assume that the gender problematic is a simple problem, or that gender studies can provide the final analysis of the problem, and then action can follow. This denial of the political character of the gender problematic is a first problem. The gender problematic

is not a simple problem, but a messy one, or a wicked one, or simply a political one, meaning that there is no real consensus about what the problem is exactly, about why and for whom it is a problem, about who is responsible for the existence of the problem, who is responsible for solving it. This means that there is an ongoing political power struggle over these definitions. The words that are used, habitually suggest consensus, but more often than not these words – inequality between men and women, differences between men and women, equal opportunities between men and women – function as buzz words: they allow the illusion of consensus, until a hidden difference of opinion can no longer be concealed.

Implementation of policies moreover is always a political process, subject to all mechanisms of political processes. In the phase of implementation of gender equality policies, therefore it can never be a matter of just doing what has been agreed on. The involvement of new actors will often mean that the illusion of consensus about the problem diagnosis is shattered or challenged. Furthermore, there is an ongoing dynamic in political and bureaucratic contexts, which in itself would introduce a political dimension in the process of implementation.

In applying the theoretical framework that I explained before, these political dimensions can be highlighted. The accent is on the dynamic interaction between interests, ideas and institutions, between political opportunities, mobilizing networks and strategical framing. In describing experiences with gender mainstreaming in the Netherlands, I will use this framework.

Gender mainstreaming in the Netherlands: developing and implementing the EER (Gender Impact Assessment)

In 1998, Mr Ad Melkert, then co-ordinating Minister for Equality Policies in the Netherlands, spoke at a national conference on Gender Impact Assessment at all levels of governance. He admitted to having had serious doubts about the Dutch instrument EER (Emancipation Effect Report, a gender impact assessment) in the past: too much trouble, too much time, too costly. However, he said he was converted and convinced by the fact that the instrument was apparently 'working', that it did what it was supposed to do: show how and where a policy that was meant as general, as gender neutral, had a negative impact on gender relations. He stressed that thanks to the EER, policies now could be improved. He was one of a good many politicians and policy makers at that conference who were enthusiastic and positive about the instrument.

The EER was developed as a result of the early Dutch policy goal of integration of emancipation in the overall government policies. As mentioned before, emancipation policies in the Netherlands were never meant to be restricted to specific or targeted policies for women

only. Until 1994, however, there were no special instruments available to facilitate or improve this integration. The EER was designed in 1994 to analyse ex ante the potential effects of new government policies on gender relations in Dutch society (Verloo & Roggeband 1994; Verloo & Roggeband 1996). Since then, the instrument has generated a little family of its own variations. Recently, a comprehensive evaluation study on the EERs at the national level was published (Van de Graaf, Mossink & Groeflin 1999). There is enough experience now to answer the question if is it true that the Dutch instrument EER, is a success. And to try to understand why it is or why it is not.

At the time when the EER was made, there were only a few people who believed in its potential existence. There were no previous examples known. There was only a high level political will (Elske ter Veld, the Secretary of State for Emancipation Policies and well known feminist who had previously worked in the equality office of the country's largest trade union), a firm will in the equality bureaucracy (Joke Swiebel, working at the co-ordinating equality unit -DCE- and taking advantage of a vacuum at the top) and two researchers determined to make it happen.

The development of any new policy instrument is a delicate political process involving technical, theoretical, but maybe most of all strategic problems. It involves making compromises, in all parts of the development process. For the development of the EER, it was decided to use the general model of Impact Assessments. The goal of any impact assessment is to analyse the potential effects of new policy plans or programmes before they are implemented. In general this type of studies, known mostly in the field of environmental policy is designed in six steps:

1. Description of the current situation.
2. Description of probable development without new policy.
3. Description and analysis of the new policy plan.
4. Description of potential effects of the new policy plan.
5. Evaluation of the positive and negative potential effects.
6. Development of alternatives to avoid or to mitigate potential negative effects.

The decision to use the basic model of any Impact Assessment solved not only a technical problem, but also made the acceptance of the instrument easier, because of this connection to an existing and successful instrument. This connection on the other hand could not be stretched too far, because the terms of reference for the development of the instrument made it clear that the instrument should not be too demanding (in terms of costs, time, or even expertise). There was simply no political support for an EER to be compulsory or highly sophisticated like its environmental sister.

This weak support can be illustrated by the fact that the development of alternatives, normally the sixth step of an Impact Assessment, initially was not part of the EER. The

elimination of the sixth step is the result of a compromise. The civil servants in charge of supervising the development of the EER thought that this step would make the instrument too costly, and they did not want to accept it. As a result there was only a recommendation to develop alternatives in the first design of the EER, not a requirement. Along the same lines, the use of gender experts to conduct the EER was also only put as a recommendation.

In fact, some of the discussion partners at the Ministry would have preferred an instrument that was idiot-proof, that needed no gender expertise at all and could be applied in less than one day. Therefore the next problem was how to combine that 'wish' with a reality where gender relations are very complex and any gender impact assessment would necessarily need a certain degree of sophistication. Introducing a theoretical framework that was based on firm academic knowledge, yet also connectable to the existing emancipation policy history solved this problem.

The theoretical framework that was presented refers to three questions in its three main elements.

1. Where are the structurally unequal power relations between men and women to be found?
2. How do they function? What are the mechanisms producing them?
3. How are they to be evaluated?

The first element, structures, refers to the foundations of gender relations, showing which institutions and organisations are most crucial in the constitution of gender inequality. The second element, processes, emphasises the formal theoretical level: what are the mechanisms that constitute and reproduce gender relations? And the third element, criteria, is the normative element, necessary to be able to decide whether a certain situation is to be judged positively or negatively.

For a description of the most important *structures* a connection could be made to the 'Analysis of the Women's Question' that was made for the government in 1982 (and was considered still valid in the nineties, both by femocrats and by academic experts [see Keuzenkamp & Teunissen 1990]). Building upon this analysis and upon more recent knowledge the two main structures of gender inequality were described as the division of labour, and, secondly, the organisation of intimacy and sexuality. The importance of differences between women, in terms of their different positioning within these structures, was stressed, but not elaborated on in detail.

In operationalising the *processes*, the mechanisms of gender relations, the EER turned to academic knowledge about mechanisms of power in social practices. Anthony Giddens' structuration theory was the main source for this part (Giddens 1984). Here, a connection could be made to the established problem definition in the Dutch emancipation policies stating that there were 'unequal power relations between the sexes'. Two mechanisms related

to the constitution of power relations were distinguished, the first being the distribution and access to resources, and the second the use of rules (interpretations and norms) about or connected to gender in interaction and at an institutional level.

For the last element, the evaluation, *criteria* were used that had a long history in different Dutch policy fields. The first criterion – the most significant one in Dutch emancipation policies - is equality in the sense of equality before the law and equal treatment in similar circumstances. To avoid equality in the sense of sameness, or adaptation to a male norm, the criterion of pluriformity (a society where differences are not hierarchical) was added. Pluriformity was also a central principle in Dutch emancipation policies, be it a more recent one. To further accentuate how this pluriformity was grounded in different choices the criterion of autonomy (the possibility for women to decide for themselves what is a good life) was added. This criterion of autonomy was the central principle used in Dutch development policies.

In the final design of the EER, this theoretical framework of the instrument is then combined with the basic Impact Assessment steps. This means essentially that the current and future situation in a policy field has to be described for both structures, that the distribution of resources and the occurrence and functioning of gender rules has to be described and analysed for both the current and future situation in a policy field, and that the potential result of a policy plan then has to be evaluated in terms of equality, autonomy and pluriformity.

Gender equality policy frames and the EER

The development of the Dutch instrument shows the occurrence and the importance of connecting to existing policy frames. In the Netherlands, policy definitions of the gender problematic that were framed and analysed in terms of power could be found in the existing authoritative 'Analysis of the women's question'. Policy frames for the criteria could be found as well. The existing Environmental Impact Assessment functioned as a legitimising methodological frame, and thereby enhanced the political and bureaucratic opportunities. This linking to existing policy frames has been crucial for the acceptance of the instrument, and can therefore be seen as positive.

The specific strategical choices that were made in the course of designing the EER have problematic consequences too. The choice to use an existing theoretical framework and existing criteria also "freezes" its content to the state of the art knowledge of 1994, and downplays any political debate on its content. In that sense, the EER is a technocratic instrument, and as such can have a depoliticising effect. To assure a more dynamic connection to feminist academic knowledge, or to allow for renewed feminist debates on its analytical starting points, it would be necessary to at least organise evaluations and revisions of the EER

at regular intervals. Although this was not planned from the beginning, fortunately it has happened at least once, in 1999[14].

As a result of its strategical designing, the EER may not be easily exportable either. Not because of its qualities in an academic sense, but because of its qualities as related to specific policy contracts, to specific political contexts. The very qualities that can make it accepted and used in the Netherlands can make it more difficult to use elsewhere. When Petra Meier and Allison Woodward were asked to develop a similar instrument for Flanders (one of Belgium's parts), they were critical towards the EER because of: the high degree of specialisation needed; the cost in time and money; the dependency on the quality of information and the lack of construction of alternatives (Woodward & Meier 1997). In Flanders the problem was that there was almost no expertise on gender available, that there were even less data on gender relations, and less support to tackle the problem. In addition, the theoretical framework of the EER did not connect to the young policy history of Flanders. In fact, there was hardly any policy history on gender equality in Flanders. There was no accepted definition of the gender problematic, and there were no accepted criteria to connect to. Because of the absence of gender equality policy frames, the (almost) non-existence of gender segregated data and the weak political support, both researchers decided to develop an instrument that is much more educational and process oriented, to try to increase awareness and knowledge on gender by asking questions at all moments in the policy process[15]. Unfortunately, the Flemish instrument has not been used since it was finished in 1997.

Evaluation of the experiences with the EER

The strength of the Dutch EER instrument is that it has been used. In 1999, nine EERs were completed at the national level. There have been EERs in the fields of education, justice, tax policy, and agriculture. The conclusions of the recent evaluation study are positive. In principle, they say, it is a good instrument. It only needs more attention and further development and elaboration, not because of the quality of the instrument, but mainly

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14   See Van de Graaf, Mossink & Groeflin 1999. In 1998, I also published a proposal to extend the theoretical framework on a personal base. M. Verloo, Alle goede dingen in drieën. Van kritiek naar ontwerp (Three is a good number. Moving from critique to design). In: *Tijdschrift voor Genderstudies,* 1998, 1, nr 4, november, pp.55-59. This article basically proposes to add one more structure, "The organisation of citizenship', one more mechanism, "violence", and one more criterium, "care/ social repsonsability".

15   The Flemish instrument is more similar to Canadian and New Zealand gender analyses. See:
     Ministry of Women's Affairs (1996). The Full Picture: guidelines for gender analysis. Wellington: Ministry for Women's Affairs.
     Status of Women Canada (1996). Gender-based analysis. A guide for policy making. Ottawa: Status of Women Canada.

concerning the context around it. The main points of attention are: the position of the EER in the policy making process, the political support for the EER, the translation of its conclusions to alternatives and recommendations and the availability of guidelines for the people who commission it. According to the evaluation the points mentioned by Woodward & Meier were not a problem in the Netherlands: there was enough expertise - often hired from outside -, it was not too time and cost consuming, and in reality it nearly always did include recommendations or alternatives.

Two elements in the evaluation report are most important. The first concerns the quality of the critical assessment of the policy documents. It emphasizes that the analysis of the proposed policy plan should include a very precise analysis of its problem/solution combination. It should analyse not only the solutions proposed but also the problem definition on its gender impact. According to the researchers, some of the EERs have not been critical enough towards the overall framing of the policy problem at hand. The evaluations also warn of a simplification of the instrument (on the basis of experiences on the local level with simplified checklists), arguing that the gender perspective is easily lost, leading to 'sex without gender', often presenting women as only vulnerable victims again. In fact, these points are related to the transformative potential of the EER, because they accentuate that this potential can only be realised when the EER can be fundamentally critical about the way policy proposals construct problems.

The second important point from the evaluation report is related to the place of the instrument in the policy process. The researchers discerned a tendency to conduct the Gender Impact Assessment at too late a stage, when policy plans can hardly be changed any more. As can be expected, this seriously weakens the impact of the instrument. This point is presented as a technical problem in the evaluation report. Probably this problem is more complicated, and of a more political character. Part of the problem is the process character of policymaking in the Netherlands, resulting in a cascade of draft texts that makes it difficult to decide when there is a text to apply an EER on. The problem could also be that at each specific level where (parts of) policies are in fact constructed, different sets of actors are present or absent, to the extent that previous support for the use of the instrument is not shared, that previous existing opportunities are absent, and that other frames, values and norms prevail.

The evaluation report also makes a comparison between the work of 'internal', 'external', and 'joint venture' teams in executing the EERs. It shows that 'joint venture' teams worked best, combining the advantages of distance (the external experts) and defining power (the internal policy makers). Next best was an external team, because some distance proved necessary in order to be critical. In terms of the theoretical framework presented earlier, the difference in performance between these teams seems to be related to their respective capacities for strategical framing, networking and the access to opportunities. In joint venture

teams, two frames are present, and that could explain their better performance in frame bridging. Moreover, joint venture teams could potentially offer access to more than one set of (mobilising or supporting) networks. Furthermore, compared to the "external" teams, the joint venture teams probably have better access to whichever opportunities are available.

The EER and gender mainstreaming: a critical assessment

Some reflections can be added to the evaluation described in the previous paragraph. At the time of its development, the EER was constructed as an instrument that could (and, ideally, would) be used for all policies that possibly had a relevance to gender. Now, six years later, eleven EERs have been finished. During these six years probably more than a hundred new policies have been launched, to give but a very low estimate. The process of selecting policies for an EER therefore is highly significant.

If the EER were truly an instrument for gender mainstreaming, then it would be necessary to (re)organise the policy process in such a way, that an EER will be undertaken for at least the most crucial, the most important policies. So far, this has not been organised. The instrument is supposed to sell itself, to be adopted in a voluntary way. In fact, it did sell itself, but very slowly. Solely the Ministry of Education tried to adopt a strategy where all parts of its organisation were supposed to use the instrument in a pilot project, but this strategy failed for lack of supporters and expertise. Possible solutions for a better selection process are not hard to find, but all of them would depend on political and bureaucratic will. One solution would be an EER screening committee that should decide for all policies whether an EER is necessary or not (parallel to the procedure for an Environmental Impact Assessment in the Netherlands). Another one would be to institutionalise the use of a screening instrument like SMART[16]. Or simply to make the use of the EER compulsory, of course…

A second reflection is on the further development of a gender mainstreaming strategy. Much more would be needed for successful gender mainstreaming than only the use of this first instrument. Gender mainstreaming cannot be restricted to the screening of policy proposals by an analytical, technical instrument. A more comprehensive process of gender mainstreaming also involves the inclusion of gender expertise and gender training, and the organisation of consultation or participation of relevant experts and users into the policy making process. Such a mix of different tools can work as triangulation, where the combination of the three types of tools can maximise the advantages, and minimise the weak points[17]. Unfortunately, so far the Dutch government has not made a comprehensive

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[16]   For a description of SMART, see Gender Mainstreaming (1998), p.66.

[17]   This can be seen as a form of methodological triangulation. See: Denzin (1984). This is called triangulation because normally at least three methods or points of view are needed for

mainstreaming plan. Only recently has the Dutch government started to consider the development of a more comprehensive approach on gender mainstreaming, including a further elaboration of the EER. This new initiative could be very promising.

Weaknesses of the EER

Looking at discussions within gender studies, there is also a need for improvement of the EER itself. In its current form the EER gives some attention to differences within the category of women, but there is no substantial consideration of other structural inequalities. What could be done to counter the growing (and justified) criticism that a focused attention on gender only and not on other structural inequalities is totally inadequate? The current component in the EER where there is just one question that asks demands attention for differences within the category of women is unsatisfactory. Just to "add other differences and stir" will not work. The relationship between gender and ethnicity/or race, between gender and sexuality, or between gender and class, to name just three of the most important structural inequalities, are much too complex for that. In the Netherlands, the EER has been designed to point at the most important structures, mechanisms and criteria that concern gender. There is no reason to believe that exactly the same structures, mechanisms and criteria are the right ones when other structural inequalities are concerned. To give but a few examples: we have equal legal rights for both genders, but not for Dutch citizens and migrants living in the Netherlands. We can analyse the 'organisation of intimacy' as a fundamental structure for gender inequality, but why should that be one of the structures of racial/ethnic inequality? People can escape homophobia and discrimination on the basis of sexuality by hiding in the closet, but people cannot escape racism and sexism in the same way, it is difficult to hide sex or colour. Therefore the analytical elements that are important for other structural inequalities should be established first before anything resembling a Diversity Impact Assessment can be designed. Because of these weaknesses at the theoretical level, the most obvious "diversity"[18] mainstreaming strategy would be not to start with analytical tools, but to start with tools that use consultation or participation of relevant experts and organisations[19]. There are some

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comparisons and contrasts to be illuminating, and to allow conclusions to be drawn. This is because three-way comparisons are less likely to lead to simple polarized oppositions which merely move back and forth without allowing for resolution.

[18]   The word diversity is used here as a parallel goal to gender equality, implying the abolition of all structural inequalities.

[19]   Although these type of tools allow for a more political accent in gender mainstreaming, their disadvantage –especially if this is the only tool used - can be that they put the burden of acting against a certain inequality on the shoulders of those groups who are suffering most from this inequality, thereby reinforcing the existing dominance patterns.

initiatives to work on this, but so far only at an informal level. It would be most urgent to formally develop more knowledge and practices on the intersection of gender and other inequalities.

Explaining the relative success of the EER

Returning to our three main theoretical concepts, we can clearly see the relevance of all three factors in explaining the relative success of the EER. There have been good *political opportunities*. In general, the Netherlands has had a relative long history of equality policies, and a traditional openness towards NGO's. More specifically, there were particular political opportunities because the State Secretary wanted to develop the EER, and because, due to the facet policy, there was already some inter-ministerial co-operation on gender equality. Later the political opportunities diminished, especially the support of top politicians and top bureaucrats. Recently, the prominent attention for gender mainstreaming at the international level stimulated a renewed interest in the instrument, and a new élan that could lead to incorporating the instrument in a more comprehensive gender mainstreaming strategy.

There were also strong *mobilising networks*, both within and outside the bureaucracy. At times when political opportunities were lower, feminist NGO's repeatedly have put high pressure on state agents to use the EER. The support and strength of the equality unit within the state bureaucracy has varied considerably, due mainly to changes in staff and to varying opinions of civil servants.

Concerning *strategical framing*, it is striking that the theoretical framework of the EER was carefully constructed out of already "adopted" elements, both in its methodology (referring to environmental policy), and in its theoretical framework. This framing made it almost impossible not to accept the instrument.

Maybe the concepts can also help to explain how relative this success is. The political opportunities and the mobilising structures allowed for the design, and the introduction of the EER on a voluntary basis. This is more than can be found in almost any other country, but it is still quite limited. There is no formal reorganisation of policy processes so that the instrument will be used. In that sense, there is no gender mainstreaming yet. No revolution at all.

When I look back, I realise that there has been little pressure on the Dutch government till now to take a further step. Feminist NGO's have been active in demanding specific EERs on policies that they considered highly relevant, such as tax policy, or a new electoral system, but they have not requested a more structural use of the instrument. This could be related to the fact that many feminist NGO's in the Netherlands are organized around specific issues, and that there is not a more general national feminist umbrella organisation. The characteristics of

the mobilising structures in the Netherlands could help to explain the lack of pressure for a more structural approach.

The absence of mobilising structures has also meant that there have been no efforts, inside or outside the bureaucracy, to even frame the necessity of a more formally organised process. More analysis would be needed to find out why this has not been the case. One of my hypotheses would be that such a frame would be too much of a contrast to the Dutch style of policy making, which is rather consensual, and reluctant of too formal organising[20]. The Dutch state is rather weak, it depends on consensus for the realisation of its policies. Another hypothesis along the same lines would be that this is related to weariness of Big Efforts. The Dutch culture favours pragmatism, and pragmatism is hard to combine with a Major Project to Change All Policies…

Finally, we can use the concepts to clarify the specific form and content of the EER, and of the Dutch gender mainstreaming enterprise. The specific Dutch opportunities-networks-framing mix has put the gender mainstreaming enterprise in a technocratic track that can be expected to resonate for a long time in future Dutch gender equality policy development.

Much more would be needed for a solid and more dynamic comprehensive gender mainstreaming framework. Because of the technocratic track that has been the result of the specific Dutch opportunities-networks-framing mix, it is not really impossible, but rather unlikely that such a gender mainstreaming framework will be developed. Rather it can be expected that future elaborations of a gender mainstreaming strategy will also get trapped into this technocratic framework.

Vienna, June 2001

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[20] See: W. Kickert & R. in 't Veld 1995; Toonen 1998; van Waarden 1995.

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