

Understanding Policy Diffusion across Feminist Social Movements: The Case of Gender Mainstreaming in Eastern Germany

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

INTRODUCTION

Since the mid-1990s, gender mainstreaming has become an increasingly central part of the social policy agenda of the European Union and many of its member states. Gender mainstreaming is intended to promote gender equality through the incorporation of attention to the gendered dimensions of specific policies and of the policymaking process overall. Gender mainstreaming takes as its starting point that most policies are not gender neutral but that policymakers can assess the gendered effects of a policy both in advance of introducing it

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and by an analysis of existing policy. While gender mainstreaming has sparked debate even among its proponents within the EU's governing bodies, it is generally positioned as an innovative and potentially transformative policy approach that will benefit feminist interests.

Yet not all feminists embrace gender mainstreaming as a potentially helpful new policy agenda. Controversy is evident in scholarly discussions and debates about the concept (e.g., Daly 2005; Stratigaki 2005; Verloo 2005; Woodward 2003), as well as among practitioners in the field of international development, where gender mainstreaming appears to have originated as early as the 1970s (Mukhopadhyay 2004). Feminist activists appear to have mixed responses to this concept. Variations in responses may affect if and how gender mainstreaming diffuses across feminist social movements.

Examining the diffusion of gender mainstreaming among feminist social movements in eastern Germany, this article explores the conditions under which existing social movements adopt new issues as part of their agenda. While not assuming *a priori* that social movement support will be necessary for the diffusion of a new policy, existing social movements and their attendant organizations often become key players in pushing for the adoption and/or enforcement of new policies, especially when such policies appear to further social movement goals. Still, not all social movements will advocate or serve as watchdogs for new policy ideas simply because they become available (Liu 2006).

To identify the diverse factors that influence whether social movements adopt or reject new policy paradigms as part of their agendas, I examine the level of adoption of gender mainstreaming within two local women's movements in postsocialist eastern Germany. The feminist movement in the northeastern Baltic port of Rostock has rallied around gender mainstreaming, making it a focal point of its advocacy work. In the southeastern city of Erfurt, also in the former German Democratic Republic (GDR, or East Germany), however, the feminist movement had not taken any significant steps to integrate gender mainstreaming through the end of 2005. In spite of a number of shared features and conditions across the two cities, and, perhaps most importantly, in spite of a good deal of disagreement among feminists in both cities about the meaning and value of gender mainstreaming, the fate of the EU's agenda for gender mainstreaming has proven quite different within these two local feminist movements thus far.

While the scholarship on gender mainstreaming widely conceptualizes this policy agenda as primarily relevant at the national and supranational

level (see Greed 2004), gender mainstreaming can and, according to EU policymakers, *should* be implemented within provinces, districts, municipalities, and other subnational entities, as it has been in a few countries in the EU, notably Sweden and the Netherlands. Up to now, the scholarship has focused on national-level analyses (Beveridge, Nott, and Stephen 2000; Booth and Bennett 2002; Squires 2005; Verloo 2001; Walby 2005; Woodward 2003) and on comparative analyses of national-level implementation (Daly 2005; True and Mintrom 2001; Woodward 2003). Although such efforts provide valuable insight into the policy diffusion process at the national level and the importance of feminist transnational networks in that diffusion process (True and Mintrom 2001), these accounts do not explain local-level factors that influence the adoption of gender mainstreaming among local feminist movements. This study builds on these endeavors by examining the perspectives of nonelite, non-EU actors who, to date, have been absent in the scholarship on gender mainstreaming. It provides an important window into the ways in which social actors who are likely to be involved in the diffusion and implementation of gender mainstreaming on the ground actually understand and experience it.

I begin by introducing gender mainstreaming and its possibilities and pitfalls. I then explain how the bridging of concepts from the literatures on policy diffusion and frame resonance forms the framework that guides the subsequent analysis. Next, I discuss the research design and data sources utilized in this project. I subsequently turn to the cases at hand to illuminate why the local feminist movements in Rostock and Erfurt have responded so differently to gender mainstreaming as a policy innovation. Feminist attitudes toward gender mainstreaming do not predict its adoption in these two cities. Instead, practical and material considerations resulting from a conjuncture of factors both internal and external to these movements explain the divergent levels of adoption of gender mainstreaming among local feminist movements.

UNDERSTANDING GENDER MAINSTREAMING

Since its formal introduction into the European Commission in 1996, gender mainstreaming has been the source of considerable confusion and consternation among EU policymakers and the EU public alike. According to the Group of Specialists of the Council of Europe, gender

mainstreaming is “the (re)organization, improvement, development and evaluation of policy processes, so that a gender equality perspective is incorporated in all policies, at all levels and at all stages, by the actors normally involved in policy-making” (Group of Specialists on Mainstreaming 1998). Alternately described in EU documents and by gender mainstreaming advocates as a theory, method, tool, strategy, concept, program, or mechanism (Booth and Bennett 2002), gender mainstreaming seeks to provide new approaches for gender-sensitive policymaking by drawing attention to the ways in which policies at various levels of governance may differentially affect women and men and by redressing differences when they are discovered.

A core assumption underlying gender mainstreaming is that gender is socially created and embedded in institutions, including the state. The gender mainstreaming framework recognizes that states (re)produce gender relations and inequalities and therefore must be activated if gender equality is to be achieved (V. Schmidt 2005). Specifically, gender mainstreaming accepts the feminist contention that many state policies and practices that appear to be gender neutral are, in fact, based on men’s interests and the expectations of male citizens. Gender mainstreaming calls for an interrogation of state policies to identify if and how gender is embedded. It pushes for incorporation of gender issues into all aspects of governance and public policy and challenges the treatment of women’s issues as a distinct policy problem (Mazey 2001).

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

Since the introduction of gender mainstreaming by the European Commission in 1996, the EU has taken steps to encourage the adoption of gender mainstreaming among member states. While largely symbolic, receipt of most forms of EU funds is contingent on the implementation of gender mainstreaming programs at the national level within member states. Gender mainstreaming has been discussed within various EU institutions in an effort to educate leaders from the member states about the policy and its implementation. Since 2003, the Commission of European Communities’ Unit on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men has been required to present an annual report on gender

mainstreaming in the EU to the European Council and European Parliament. With the introduction of a new Roadmap for Equality between Women and Men in place for 2006–10 and with 2007 designated the European Year of Opportunity for All, the propagation of gender mainstreaming shows no immediate signs of abating, although it is in a constant state of transformation.

Weak enforcement mechanisms have contributed to significant variation in the adoption and implementation of gender mainstreaming among the EU member states. At the federal level, Germany has taken the basic steps necessary to comply with EU doctrine but has been far from pathbreaking or enthusiastic in its adoption of gender mainstreaming. In fact, Germany is widely considered a laggard among EU member states in western Europe. Given the German government's historic lack of interest in feminist and gender issues, the relative weakness of feminist state machineries at the federal level, and the absence of a strong women's movement, the begrudging embrace of gender mainstreaming at the national level is not surprising.

While often ignored or passively resisted by policymakers within EU member states, gender mainstreaming has proven contentious among feminist activists, scholars, and policymakers across the EU. Some question whether gender mainstreaming offers a meaningful or viable strategy for reducing gender inequality (Booth and Bennett 2002; Verloo 2001). Others fear that if gender mainstreaming moves gender issues out of the policy ghetto, it will also lead gender issues out of the control of feminists, thus resulting in dilution (Woodward 2003). Recent critiques have questioned whether gender mainstreaming necessarily reflects and promotes a feminist agenda, or if its more gender neutral approach undercuts feminist politics (Lombardo and Meier 2006). A major concern is that in climates hostile to women's interests, gender mainstreaming will provide a smokescreen behind which state actors can reduce or eliminate programs specifically targeting women, such as affirmative action policies or funds for services for women (Stratigaki 2005; Woodward 2003). Whether and how gender mainstreaming can engage with remedies for other interrelated inequalities also remains unclear (Squires 2005).

That EU policies and practices of gender mainstreaming are sometimes contradictory, or involve multiple approaches to gender inequality, further renders the concept "fuzzy" (Booth and Bennett 2002). The complexity of gender mainstreaming, both as an idea and as a program to be implemented, augments this fuzziness. How gender mainstreaming is

defined and implemented often varies across institutions. Educational materials lay out a series of sophisticated discussions of the premise and implementation of gender mainstreaming. The idea is difficult to capture in a sound bite or even in a brochure; as one feminist activist I interviewed as part of the present study declared in frustration, “You can’t even explain it in one sentence. You have to use ten sentences, and then attend a seminar!”

An additional challenge to the successful diffusion of the gender mainstreaming agenda is that it is not translated into the native languages of the member states but is referred to in English throughout the European Union. Even in English, the term has little intuitive meaning, but in other languages, it is often difficult to pronounce, let alone understand. Thus, it is often interpreted as nonsensical and foreign (Booth and Bennett 2002).

In spite of these problems, gender mainstreaming could be attractive to feminist social movement actors because it presents a unique opportunity to move women’s issues out of the policy ghetto and offers an innovative and potentially revolutionary new model for gender relations (Woodward 2003). In their analysis of gender mainstreaming diffusion in 157 countries, Jacqui True and Michael Mintrom (2001) find that feminist transnational advocacy networks involving femocrats and international nongovernmental organizations (INGOs) play a key role in the dissemination and implementation of gender mainstreaming. Yet locally based, grassroots feminist social movement organizations within EU member states have been relatively quiet on this issue. In Germany, nonstate feminists have not rallied around gender mainstreaming at the national level. Gender mainstreaming could be a useful policy paradigm for promoting feminist interests at subnational levels of governance, and certainly the EU intends for gender mainstreaming to be implemented at all levels of the state. Still, it is experiencing uneven adoption across local feminist movements.

Perspectives on Policy Diffusion

The rich literature on policy diffusion among states and state institutions informs the framework for exploring responses to gender mainstreaming among local feminist social movements in eastern Germany. Policy diffusion typically refers to the process of policy learning or emulation in which policymakers view the experiences of others as models either to

follow or avoid (Karch 2007). Current scholarship on policy diffusion generally focuses on uncovering the determinants of whether a governmental unit adopts a new policy idea, utilizing policy enactment as the dependent variable. I adapt core concepts from work on policy diffusion across state institutions to social movements in order to assess the usefulness of concepts from the literature on policy diffusion in understanding why (or why not) a social movement rallies around a new issue. Although social movements face somewhat different opportunities and constraints than state actors, the two groups also share many parallels, such as accountability to constituents and resource considerations.

Since the call of Frances Stokes Berry and William Berry (1990) to examine features both within and outside of states that contribute to the adoption of new policies and the spread of new policies across states, scholars have cast increasingly wider nets in exploring the diverse dynamics that best explain how and why new policies emerge and spread. I build on and extend the literature on policy diffusion by examining internal and external determinants of the spread of a policy idea across social movements. Internal determinants of social policy adoption include organizational resources, ideologies, institutional dynamics, and capacity *within* a given feminist movement. External determinants include pressures from external sources, such as regional trends or demands made by more powerful allies (Berry and Berry 1999; Daley 2007; Dolowitz and Marsh 1996), as well as both political and discursive opportunities and limitations the state presents to social movements. Political opportunities refer to openings within the political system that diminish the risks of action to social movement actors and increase their chances at a desired outcome (Tarrow 1994). From a political opportunity perspective, social movements incorporate new issues or policy agendas when it appears politically viable and advantageous to do so. Discursive opportunities involve alignments between the ideas and ideologies of social movements seeking to effect change and those of states and state institutions and/or the broader public (Ferree et al. 2002; V. A. Schmidt 2008).

While most scholarship on policy diffusion focuses largely on different types of pressure on policymakers — from the electorate, neighboring or more powerful states, the media, and interest groups — to follow a policy lead, there has been less attention on how the framing of an issue contributes to diffusion processes. Utilizing a framing perspective proves helpful in understanding the conditions under which a new policy idea might strike a chord within an existing social movement. Two interacting

sets of factors influence the resonance of frames, broadly defined as structures of meaning that help people make sense of the world around them (Benford and Snow 2000). First, credibility encompasses frame consistency, or the congruence of the beliefs, claims, and actions of an organization, institution, or movement that produces frames. Credibility also involves empirical validity, or the degree to which the policy corresponds with actual or invented empirical evidence, as well as the perceived credibility of those advocating for the policy. The second set of factors center on the salience of a policy idea. Key here is centrality — or how central the ideas, beliefs, and values of the policy idea are to those of the target group — and experiential commensurability — or how congruent the policy is with the everyday lived experience of the target group. Thus, resonance depends not only on symbolic or discursive alignment between a policy and the ideologies and values of a social movement, but also on the material conditions of a social movement and the political structures within which a movement operates.

Because the gender mainstreaming concept is vague and open to interpretation, feminist movements can develop a range of possible responses to it and in fact can reframe it. Bringing attention to internal and external determinants of policy diffusion and attending to organizational, political, *and* discursive dimensions of policy diffusion illuminate why the feminist movement in one eastern German city embraced gender mainstreaming while the feminist movement in another city in eastern Germany rejected it.

Even if a policy resonates with the ideologies and goals of a social movement, it may be dissonant with the conditions and opportunities facing a movement. A social movement may not mobilize around a new policy idea if it seems that success is improbable or if such mobilization might in some way threaten the movement. On the other hand, movements might embrace even a new policy idea that is only vaguely ideologically resonant if mobilization around that new policy idea would seem to advance the movement's other goals or interests. Social movements go through a cost–benefit analysis in which movement actors debate the merits, limitations, and risks of pursuing a new policy idea. Debates are not necessarily formal or organized but can occur through more hidden transcripts of making sense of a policy agenda. I explore these debates to understand how feminist actors make sense of gender mainstreaming and its potential benefits and dangers.

Internal and external factors also reflect processes occurring at multiple scales of action (Krook 2006). The localities within which these feminist

movements operate are nested in regional, national, and transnational systems of power and webs of communication. I thus approach policy diffusion across social movements as potentially influenced by local and domestic factors, as well as by transnational dimensions. A key component of this multiscalar approach involves recognizing that the process of policy diffusion routinely entails its mirror response, policy resistance. Policy resistance may be especially prevalent when diffusion efforts are instigated by the more powerful actors in asymmetrical power relations (Bache and Taylor 2003). Given eastern Germany's subordinate position relative to the EU, policy efforts emanating from the EU could be at increased risk of encountering resistance.

BACKGROUND AND METHODS

To explore the reception of gender mainstreaming among feminist social movement actors, I compare how the local women's movements in two cities in eastern Germany, Rostock and Erfurt, have responded to this policy agenda. I selected these cases as a strategically matched pair based on key similarities and differences (Paulsen 2004). As indicated earlier, local feminist social movements have adopted gender mainstreaming to very different degrees in these two cities. This cannot be explained by the demographic features of the two cities as they are of equal size and are home to populations with virtually identical characteristics in terms of distribution by age, gender, race, income, educational attainment, and so forth. The two cities have a shared history of socialism, and both face the same core problems that all cities in eastern Germany have grappled with since German unification in 1990, namely, high unemployment, slow economic redevelopment, and the devastating out-migration of residents to western Germany or other parts of Europe. They also share virtually identical structures of local governance.

In addition, both cities are home to vibrant feminist movements. Although feminist organizing in eastern Germany has attracted little public attention since the dissolution of the East German women's movement, which was active during the collapse of state socialism in 1989 and the unification of East and West Germany in 1990, feminist activity continues at the local level (Guenther 2006). The East German government actively promoted women's labor force participation. With German unification, West Germany's traditional ideologies of gender

and less egalitarian social policies trumped East Germany's recognition of women's contributions inside and outside of the home (Dodds 1998; Einhorn 1992, 1993; Rueschmeyer 1998). East Germany's extensive web of policies and programs that enabled women to participate actively in economic and social life were dismantled. Seeking outlets for their feminist political impulses and sources of employment during an era of major economic upheaval, many women who joined the national-level mobilizations of 1989–90 have since turned to local women's projects that are typically organized around a specific women's issue, such as violence against women or women's employment opportunities (Lang 2000). These local organizations simultaneously address specific issues facing women while challenging systemic inequalities based on gender more broadly. Local feminist organizations usually offer social service provisioning, such as rape crisis and domestic violence intervention counseling or job training and referrals, while also engaging in policy advocacy targeting mostly municipalities and local states.

Although there is a good deal of variation across organizations comprising them, these local feminist movements may be fairly described as state centered. Feminist organizations in eastern Germany often receive a significant proportion of funding from state agencies, and organizations routinely work closely with femocrats, or elected or appointed feminist state officials. Most femocratic positions, such as Gender Equity Representatives, the political appointees who oversee matters related to gender and women at various levels of governance in Germany, were created in 1990 without significant input or pressure from feminist organizers (Ferree 1995; Lang 2000). Still, increasing the capacity of Gender Equity Representatives at the municipal and local state levels has been a key goal of feminist mobilizations in eastern Germany. While feminist dependence on the state may be problematic, as some critics of state-centered or "NGO feminism" have noted (Einhorn 2000; Einhorn and Sever 2003; Lang 2000), it suggests that feminist social movements in eastern Germany would be competent and able to respond to a new policy paradigm like gender mainstreaming.

The present analysis draws on observations, archival data, and in-depth interviews with 63 feminist activists — women who are or have been active in the women's movement at some point since 1989 — and femocrats in Rostock and Erfurt to tease out why feminist organizations in Rostock have adopted gender mainstreaming while those in Erfurt have not. These data were collected as part of a larger research project examining the development of local feminist movements in eastern

Germany since the end of socialism. Although gender mainstreaming was not the sole focus of this broader research agenda, the original research design attended to this topic by seeking to document the history of responses to gender mainstreaming within these two feminist movements over time.

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

I discussed gender mainstreaming in semistructured interviews with 32 women in Rostock and 31 women in Erfurt.¹ In Rostock, the sample included five women who function primarily as femocrats, and 27 women who are principally activists.² Because Erfurt is also the capital city of the state of Thuringen, the sample there includes a greater proportion of femocrats: Eight women served primarily as femocrats, while the remaining 23 were activists. Interviews generally lasted at least 90 minutes and were routinely as long as three to four hours. Interviews were especially useful in establishing participants' views of gender mainstreaming and their understandings of why gender mainstreaming was or was not being adopted into their local feminist movement.

Participant observation at state offices and women's organizations augment the interview data, as does archival data from more than two dozen women's organizations and state offices in the two cities. Observations at meetings about gender mainstreaming were especially useful for acquiring information about how gender mainstreaming is framed and understood by feminist actors. Archival materials, on the other hand, offered insight into the growth of emphasis on gender

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

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

mainstreaming within feminist organizations over time. Meeting notes and newsletters from organizations, as well as certain legislative documents, reveal how gender mainstreaming is understood among, and marketed to, movement participants, policymakers, and the public. All data analysis was completed in the original German; translations here are mine.

Gender Innovations in the Feminist Movement in Rostock

Beginning already in the late 1990s, when it was first appearing on the EU agenda, feminists in Rostock started integrating gender mainstreaming into their work with feminist organizations. By 2000, feminist activists in Rostock had founded a women's organization dedicated solely to education and advocacy around gender mainstreaming. Several other organizations were receiving funding for services through EU programs specifically supporting or espousing gender mainstreaming. With advocacy from local feminist organizations and shepherding from the city's Gender Equity Representative, Rostock became the first municipality in Germany to pass a citywide gender mainstreaming ordinance in 2001.

The adoption and implementation of gender mainstreaming in feminist organizations — and, ultimately, in the municipality — was swift and comprehensive in Rostock. This is true even though only roughly one-third of respondents in this study from Rostock were strong advocates for gender mainstreaming. Another third were ambivalent or felt that they did not know enough about it to take a strong position, while the final third of the sample held negative views toward gender mainstreaming. Most commonly, those who did not favor gender mainstreaming feared that it would undercut support for services specifically targeting women, resented that it was not translated into German, and/or found it too complex to understand and therefore thought it would have limited public appeal.

Factors both internal and external to the feminist movement in Rostock help explain its rapid and open adoption by feminists there in spite of the apparent absence of unilateral support for gender mainstreaming among feminists. Factors internal to the feminist movement in Rostock include ideological congruence between gender mainstreaming and local feminist ideology, movement cohesion and cooperativeness, and the presence of credible feminist articulators. The gender mainstreaming framework took hold quickly, in part because of the congruence between the gender mainstreaming framework and local feminist ideologies.

Feminists in Rostock primarily emphasize women's status as workers and their rights to participate fully in paid employment. Reflecting the gender ideology of the GDR, in which women and men were seen as collaborators in the socialist project and in which gender interests were positioned as threats to class solidarity, feminists in Rostock stress the negative effects of gender inequality on both women and on men. Unlike more radical, separatist feminist ideologies common among women's projects in western Germany, feminists in Rostock encourage men's cooperation and believe that improving women's status in society is beneficial to all. Following these logics, gender mainstreaming is identified as building on a positive dimension of the GDR and as the continuation of core values about gender from the socialist era because it does not focus only on women. Even many of those who held negative views of gender mainstreaming noted that it resonated with their general ideology. As one respondent put it, "Gender mainstreaming just clicks here."

Ideological cohesion within the women's movement and an environment of cooperation also helped speed the transmission and acceptance of gender mainstreaming. Women's organizations in Rostock are closely networked, and many of them operate under shared umbrellas or work in shared physical spaces. Most activists within the movement are friends. In this collegial, close-knit community, ideas are transmitted quickly and easily, and activists and femocrats support colleagues in new endeavors.

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

I don't entirely trust the top-down approach [taken by the EU], and I am not convinced that this can work because so many different things would need to be changed, and we won't find open doors and we'll have to fight so much for it. That's why I don't assume that it will work out, that just because it's called "gender mainstreaming," suddenly everyone will be sensitive to equality politics and march off in pursuit of gender equality.

This activist clearly has multiple concerns about gender mainstreaming, including its effectiveness, potential to effect change, and strategy of implementation. Like almost all respondents, she views gender mainstreaming as something being imposed from the outside. Yet in

spite of these reservations, she was able to set aside her concerns to support colleagues and friends who strongly advocate for it. As she explained, she tabled her reservations in the interests of supporting her colleagues and reciprocating their support of her and the organizations with which she works, and because she believes that a range of different approaches to tackling gender inequality is warranted.

Finally, the presence of credible articulators within the local feminist movement facilitated the adoption of gender mainstreaming. The women's movement in Rostock includes several women who are especially well positioned to disseminate information about it. After unification, many East German academics lost their jobs, and several former professors from the university in Rostock began working in women's organizations instead. These women have experience and expertise in tackling complex concepts like gender mainstreaming and in disseminating information to students. In Rostock, former academics spearheaded the move toward gender mainstreaming, and they serve as key educators on the topic. Other activists and policymakers in Rostock hold them in high regard both as feminists and as educators. These advocates have been able to quickly and effectively share information about gender mainstreaming.

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

As Uschi, a leader in an organization specifically dedicated to education on gender mainstreaming, explains:

We tried quite hard to build this [organization] out of the Swedish experience. In Sweden, people just take gender mainstreaming for granted; it's just seen as something normal, as something that simply belongs in society, and as

something that benefits everyone, women and men. And somehow it's fun and just a part of their quality of life. And so we said, 'Good, we'll go check this thing out, to see what it's all about,' and then we organized many educational trips to Sweden. We also took many politicians with us so that they could just see what the situation there was like and truly experience the spirit of it, and we did a lot of publicizing about Swedish equality politics and gender mainstreaming. And [another activist] organized a whole series of events about it, and really worked to build up a network. . . . And it became ever clearer to me that gender mainstreaming was practical, and that we really needed to bring it into our politics here, and also into the regional politics [of the local state].

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

Even the city of Rostock's municipal ordinance on gender mainstreaming establishes its Swedish roots by referencing Swedish models of gender policy twice in the law's preamble. The ordinance draws directly on what policymakers in Rostock refer to as "the Swedish model." Reference to Sweden is important because the city positions itself as linked to the Scandinavian and Baltic states (Guenther 2006). Situated on the Baltic Sea coast, Rostock has a history centered on its status as a port city and its connections with Scandinavia, and especially Sweden. Adopting gender mainstreaming builds on — and helps maintain — this important regional tie, reaffirming local identities as part of a Baltic community.

The broader political climate in the city and region has also played a critical part in the resonance and integration of gender mainstreaming there. Politics in Rostock and Mecklenburg-Vorpommern defy the German mainstream and are dominated by the Left. While many other regions in eastern Germany shunned the postsocialist reimagining of the ruling party of East Germany, especially in the 1990s, the Baltic coast has consistently retained high levels of support for the socialist Left

through 2006. The left-leaning political culture in Rostock and in the state of Mecklenburg-Vorpommern has been supportive of women's organizations since unification, in spite of budgetary issues that are becoming increasingly problematic.

The influence of the Left has two important implications for the adoption and implementation of gender mainstreaming. First, femocrats, such as the municipal and statewide Gender Equity Representatives, as well as local women's organizations and most especially the nonpartisan statewide political network of women's organizations, have the legitimacy and capacity within the municipal and provincial governments to introduce and pass new policy initiatives. Second, the local political climate has created a stable environment in which feminist activists can feel safe to pursue diverse policy paradigms, such as gender mainstreaming, without the threat of losing state support. The idea of gender mainstreaming is relatively low risk as the political and discursive opportunity structure in Rostock creates space for feminist experimentation. This increases the credibility of gender mainstreaming among feminist actors because it seems plausible, if not probable, that the state will cooperate in meaningfully implementing it, while also supporting other feminist goals.

Coupled with ties to Scandinavia and an appreciation for the socialist past, the political climate also feeds into a public gender discourse that views women and men as important participants in all aspects of social, political, and economic life. Women's employment issues, especially, receive a good deal of attention in both political and public discourse. Local consensus appears to be that women, families, and the broader community benefit when women have employment opportunities and when children have access to child care. The migration of young women away from Rostock, coupled with a plummeting birthrate, have strengthened the local belief that the city's future depends on the satisfaction of its women. This discourse renders policies that seek to improve the status of women, such as gender mainstreaming, highly salient.

A final external motivator is more instrumental, namely, that the implementation of gender mainstreaming is attached to the prospect of receiving EU funds. This further increases its appeal, especially among feminists working in local women's organizations. Like many other eastern German cities, Rostock has experienced significant out-migration since 1990, dropping in size from more than 250,000 residents in 1989 to fewer than 200,000 in 2000. Coupled with the economic difficulties accompanying unification, out-migration has contributed to a shrinking tax base and smaller city coffers. The city government supports the work

of more than a dozen women's organizations but is unable to fund women's organizations fully.³ A decline in municipal and local state funding in the late 1990s was offset by the introduction of EU funding sources focused on gender issues and gender mainstreaming. In the early 2000s, at least three women's organizations in Rostock received the majority of their funding from the EU, and many more utilize EU funding to support specific initiatives or projects.

In sum, Rostock's position near Sweden and its regional identification and integration with Sweden enabled easy transmission of the concept of gender mainstreaming. This allowed advocates to reposition gender mainstreaming as reinforcing regional identities, rather than as something imposed by the EU. This increased its resonance and credibility. Gender ideologies both within the local state and the public, and among feminist actors with whom the concept of gender mainstreaming is congruent and resonant, increased its appeal, even among those who are uncertain about it. The political arena is open to new ideas that stress equality. The capacity of feminist bureaucrats and activists, the entrenchment of Gender Equity Representatives within local levels of governance, and the responsiveness of the dominant political parties to feminist concerns created an environment in which gender mainstreaming could be effectively discussed and implemented. The presence of credible local experts within the movement furthered understanding of the idea and expedited its implementation in the work of women's organizations and the local state. This confluence of factors internal and external to the feminist movement in Rostock rendered gender mainstreaming credible and salient there, leading to its adoption within the feminist movement.

Resisting Gender Mainstreaming in Erfurt

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

3. Unlike the United States, neither western nor especially eastern Germany has a history of private philanthropy.

Part of the difficulty faced by these supporters is that they are attempting to effect change within a highly polarized feminist movement in which many actors already feel threatened. The local state apparatus is dominated by the Christian Democratic Union (CDU), Germany's largest right-wing party, which typically avoids policy interventions into inequalities and is often hostile to feminist concerns. Activists in Erfurt consistently reported that the local state is unsupportive of feminist issues, reluctant to subsidize feminist social service organizations, and unable to reconcile the religious underpinnings of the ruling party with women's needs for child care, reproductive health, protection from violence, and empowerment.⁴ Similarly, public understandings of gender in Erfurt lean toward the traditional. Erfurt is situated in the south of Germany, which is both more religious and more conservative than the north. Public discussions about the diverse social problems afflicting the city since unification position the nuclear family as central to the provision of much-needed stability to men, women, and children. Feminists thus have constricted discursive opportunities, and often they must frame their work with reference to children and/or families in order to promote political and social change.

The women's movement in Erfurt has further struggled because of ideological conflicts within the movement itself. Radical separatist feminists constitute one major camp of feminists. Gender mainstreaming is at odds with the inherent ideology of radical feminism on several fronts. First, it is a policy that emanates from, and centers on, the state, from which radical feminists seek autonomy and which they approach with wariness. Second, they interpret gender mainstreaming as overemphasizing the negative consequences of gender inequality for men and as failing to adequately address women's oppression. In one conversation with a group of staff and volunteers at a radical feminist organization in Erfurt, the dominant theme was that the consequences of gender inequality are more severe for women than for men but that gender mainstreaming tries to make it all sound the same. These radical feminists noted that in a patriarchal society, victims of battery, rape, and incest are overwhelmingly women, and experiences with gendered violence are more detrimental to an individual's mental and

4. This is especially the case for the local state of Thüringen, of which Erfurt is the capital city; feminists have seen the city government itself as slightly more accessible, particularly in the early 1990s when the city provided a great deal of funding to feminist social service providers. However, by the early 2000s, when gender mainstreaming was really appearing on the policy scene, both city and state were using the logic of budgetary shortfalls to curtail programs and services related to gender and feminist issues.

physical well-being than the more typically male experience of gender inequality, in which men are positioned as secondary caregivers to children or as the primary breadwinner for a family. Finally, many radical feminists are suspicious of gender mainstreaming *because* of its similarity to the gender ideology of the GDR, which, they feel, offered a false promise of equality to mask what they saw as an inherently patriarchal state. These ideological differences render gender mainstreaming incongruent with radical feminism in Erfurt.

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

This small pool of gender mainstreaming advocates has had little success in changing the minds of their peers within the women's movement more broadly. Most activists and femocrats are unable to support the idea of gender mainstreaming because they fear that the state will use it to undercut the few programs for women that the movement has succeeded in securing. They simply find the risk too great. Unlike feminists in Rostock, those in Erfurt operate under the constant threat of a conservative state apparatus that has little interest in women's issues. The interpretation of experience can eliminate alternatives from the repertoire available to potential social movement and policy innovators; in this case, feminists' negative experiences in making demands on the state has limited their willingness to engage in a potentially risky policy approach, leading them to frame gender mainstreaming as a threat. Because the women's movement in Erfurt — including both radical and more conservative feminist groups — has routinely encountered roadblocks in trying to

effect change through state institutions, the idea of introducing a new agenda does not seem feasible and is perceived as possibly dangerous.

Close linkages between feminists in Erfurt and western German feminists — particularly apparent in coalition work between radical separatist feminists from both sides of the former border — results in the transmission of fears from the autonomous feminist movement in western German to that in Erfurt. The autonomous women's movement in western Germany views gender mainstreaming with skepticism. Western German feminists transmit rumors to feminists in Erfurt that some state offices and autonomous women's organizations that focused on gender issues in cities and states in western Germany were shut down or lost their funding after municipal and local state governments implemented gender mainstreaming.⁵

Tatiana, a state representative for an opposition party on the Left, expresses a fearful understanding of gender mainstreaming:

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

Here, Tatiana relays her concern that gender mainstreaming will be used to undercut services and programs for women. She uses the language of "danger" in connection with gender mainstreaming. Her comments represent the attitudes of the many feminists in Erfurt who see it as threatening to undermine their weak foundation.

That gender mainstreaming is especially complex does not increase its appeal. Coupled with the state's unresponsiveness to feminist concerns, this complexity limits femocrats' willingness to push the issue. As one respondent, Sonja, a high-ranking femocrat who identifies herself as a supporter of gender mainstreaming, told me:

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

5. I was unable to corroborate these claims, although this problem has been documented in other countries (Verloo 2001).

with this new gender agenda, or gender mainstreaming, this is again something that, in my view, is difficult, because it's something new again and not a soul understands it and no one wants to hear about it.

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

It is interesting to note that feminist activists in Erfurt fail to see any benefits from gender mainstreaming and are largely not enticed by the possible monetary benefits of adopting such programs or perspectives within their organizations, even though they receive less support from the city and the local state than do their counterparts in Rostock. Given the extreme difficulty they have experienced in securing municipal and statewide funding for women's organizations, these women should presumably embrace a new resource for funding. Instead, they continue to target local units of governance that they see as responsible for women in the community.

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

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

Here, Maria reports that male colleagues in the state parliament see gender mainstreaming as the latest in a string of feminist concoctions. While aware of men's resistance, she feels that change takes time, and she hopes that

resistance to gender mainstreaming will erode like resistance to the issue of domestic violence did.

Given the lack of legitimacy of the core group of advocates in Erfurt, however, this seems unlikely. The propagation of gender mainstreaming has been slowed by the absence of credible leaders focusing on this topic. Femocrats and feminist activists alike have low levels of legitimacy in the eyes of the state and, therefore, limited capacity to effect change. The female CDU politicians with an interest in gender mainstreaming are a small and relatively powerless group within their own party. Unlike in Rostock, the women in Erfurt who support gender mainstreaming participate in a highly divided women's movement. As such, the elected CDU officials are credible neither among their political colleagues nor among the radical feminists who dominate the nonprofit sector and the women's political lobby. Consequently, their power to introduce new legislative agendas is limited.

In sum, gender mainstreaming is not entirely resonant with either radical or more conservative feminists in the feminist movement in Erfurt, but some conservative feminists have accepted it as a worthwhile cause nonetheless, viewing it as a more promising route to gender equality than radical feminist politics. However, given the ideological rifts within the movement, they are not legitimate articulators of gender mainstreaming among other feminists. Likewise, they are not credible within the dominant political party, and cannot effect change there, either. The conservative political climate increases the perceived threat among members of both ideological camps within the feminist movement, but especially for radical feminists who see gender mainstreaming as endangering their limited gains. Coupled with the spread of fears about gender mainstreaming from western German coalition partners, the low level of state responsiveness to feminist demands limits the opportunities for activists and femocrats to feel safe enough to take risks with a new policy idea.

CONCLUSIONS

This comparative analysis illuminates the range of responses to gender mainstreaming among feminist movements working at subnational levels. The concerns about gender mainstreaming that activists and local femocrats express largely mirror those that feminist scholars identify in the academic literature, with some important omissions and differences in emphasis. Like feminist scholars, activists and femocrats expressed

concern that gender mainstreaming could be used as a tool to undermine programs focused exclusively on women and/or women's issues. They widely noted the complexity of the concept as inhibiting or retarding adoption, even in Rostock. However, none of the respondents in either city expressed any concern about the relationship that gender mainstreaming might have to other inequalities, such as those based on race, ethnicity, or sexuality. Furthermore, although it would be inaccurate to state that localized actors were not attuned to, or interested in, the contradictions between gender mainstreaming and various feminist ideologies, there was, relative to the scholarly feminist discourse, less emphasis among these women in general on the feminist politics of gender mainstreaming and greater emphasis on the material and practical implications of it. Further research on diffusion across social movements will help clarify if this practical, material focus is typical across types of movements and policies.

Ultimately, the integration of gender mainstreaming into feminist politics and organizing in Rostock and Erfurt is dependent not on individual responses to the policy initiative but, rather, on diverse resources available to these movements, including political and discursive opportunities. A lack of adoption does not necessarily indicate a lack of support within a movement, nor does adoption mean that a movement unequivocally supports a policy. Rather, a broader context of support is critical for movement mobilization around a new policy, especially if, as in the case of gender mainstreaming, a new policy idea can be interpreted either as an opportunity or as a threat to movement interests. Such supportive contexts include a conjuncture of factors both internal and external to local feminist movements.

Perspectives on policy diffusion among states and institutions and on framing are helpful for identifying factors that lead to specific paths of adoption among feminist movements. The capacity for a local feminist movement to take on a new policy paradigm emerged as the most important predictor of whether a movement mobilizes in support of a policy. As listed in Table 1, numerous factors shape this capacity. In Rostock, the left-leaning political climate, state receptiveness to feminist demands, public interest in reducing inequalities, and the capacity of femocrats created an environment in which gender mainstreaming was highly resonant and therefore well suited to actually implementing it. Historic and contemporary ties to Sweden provided a learning opportunity for both activists and policymakers, and the adoption of gender mainstreaming allowed both groups to make claims of building

Table 1. Factors contributing to the resonance of gender mainstreaming in Rostock and Erfurt

	<i>Rostock</i>	<i>Erfurt</i>
Internal movement factors		
Ideological cohesion and resonance	High	Low
Sense of threat, conflict, and competition	Low	High
Credible articulators	Present	Absent
External factors		
Political climate	Left	Right
State responsiveness to feminist demands	Responsive	Unresponsive
Regional orientation	Sweden	Western Germany
Gender discourse	Equality, egalitarianism, women's rights	Traditional, nuclear family, mothering
Outcomes		
Response to gender mainstreaming	Adopt	Reject

on an important transnational partnership. In Rostock, feminist activists view gender mainstreaming as an opportunity to promote greater gender equality and to replicate aspects of both Sweden and the GDR.

In contrast, Erfurt's conservative political climate produced a state apparatus more closed to feminist concerns, and where the capacity of femocrats and feminist activists was limited both by political considerations and by ideological rifts within the local women's movement itself. Political and discursive opportunities for feminists are scarce: Ties to western Germany and western German feminists facilitated the movement of distrust of gender mainstreaming from the autonomous women's movement in western Germany to radical feminists, especially in Erfurt. The only outspoken advocates of gender mainstreaming are the noncredible feminists active in the CDU. Hence, feminists in Erfurt perceive gender mainstreaming as threatening and have not worked to adopt it. For activists and femocrats in Rostock, there was little to lose, whereas for those in Erfurt, the stakes seemed high given the already precarious position of the women's movement vis-à-vis the state and the general public.

These findings echo those from previous comparative studies of women's and feminist movements. The strength of left-leaning political parties and a generally leftist political culture have been widely found to enhance the policy success of local feminist movements (e.g., Hellman 1987; Ortals

2008; Ray 1999). As evidenced through the present analysis, the strength of the Left plays a part not just in movement outcome but in whether a local feminist movement even engages with a new policy paradigm. A leftist environment, like that in Rostock, supports engagement with issues of equality, whereas contexts leaning toward the Right, as in Erfurt, are less concerned with egalitarianism.

Gender mainstreaming is a potentially innovative strategy for reducing gender inequalities within the European Union. Variation across national and local contexts will influence if and how this policy agenda is interpreted and implemented. Local feminist movements, who could be core allies in propagating gender mainstreaming, develop responses to new policy ideas that are grounded in specific, local experiences and contexts. Thus, while Europeanization is an important force leading to greater policy homogeneity in Europe, local settings continue to serve as important filters for the ways in which local social movements negotiate international pressures and agendas.

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