

Implementing Gender Mainstreaming in Swedish Model Municipalities

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This article analyzes the implementation of gender mainstreaming at the local level in Sweden by investigating implementation gaps in the operations of two municipalities, Eskilstuna and Jönköping. The study draws on the literature on policy implementation, particularly the dimensions of comprehension, capacity, and will, as well as the feminist institutional literature on resistance. The data are based on a micro-study of the implementation of gender mainstreaming in two model municipalities, comprising interviews with key actors and a document study. The study shows that the key obstacles to the implementation of gender mainstreaming are complacency—that is, the perception that work on gender mainstreaming is satisfactory and that no extra attention to the matter is needed—and the congestion of perspectives—the fact that the gender equality perspective must compete with other relevant perspectives, a process in which gender equality is often the loser. Another obstacle is lack of political will. However, lack of political will, even in model municipalities, may be compensated for by solid systems of governance. The study contributes to research on implementation theory and feminist institutionalism by demonstrating the gendered barriers and obstacles to affecting change, even in best-case scenarios.

Keywords: Gender mainstreaming; implementation; policy studies; political will; resistance

Gender mainstreaming gained global attention as a result of its adoption in the Beijing Platform for Action at the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing 1995. Since then, gender mainstreaming has been embraced internationally as a strategy for achieving gender equality. A standard definition of gender mainstreaming is “[the] integration of a gender perspective into the preparation, design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies, regulatory measures and spending programmes, with a view to promoting equality between women and

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men, and combating discrimination” (European Institute for Gender Equality 2018).

Although gender mainstreaming has been identified as a key strategy for achieving gender equality, its strengths and weaknesses have been the subject of ongoing discussion in feminist research. Proponents of gender mainstreaming point to its transformative capacity: the application of a gender perspective reveals male norms in structures and processes, thus enabling new understandings of how gender operates in policy making. This strategy puts women’s issues, which are often marginalized, at center stage (Sainsbury and Bergqvist 2009). Critics of gender mainstreaming point to the absence of transformative outcomes, claiming that the strategy has been reduced to a discussion of methods and techniques (Benschop and Verloo 2006). They also emphasize problems with implementation, such as lack of political will and resources, weaker institutional positions of those implementing the strategy, and resistance to the strategy (Ylösalo 2016).

Sweden has adopted gender mainstreaming as the primary strategy for achieving national gender equality objectives. Since it was adopted in 1994, gender mainstreaming has been implemented in the internal work and functioning of the government offices, in county administrative boards, and in several public authorities. In addition, the strategy has been implemented in governance of local politics (Callerstig 2014). Although this strategy has been in effect for more than 20 years, a recent study shows that it has resulted in few substantive changes (Alnebratt and Rönnblom 2016). A discrepancy is evident between the ambition to implement gender mainstreaming on the part of the government and the actual results that have been achieved. This observation is intriguing given the fact that Sweden normally scores high on international gender equality indices. Sweden ranks first on the European Union (EU) 2017 Gender Equality Index with a score of 82.6% compared with the EU average of 66.2%.

In this article, we analyze the implementation of gender mainstreaming at the local level in Sweden by investigating implementation gaps in the operations of two municipalities: Eskilstuna and Jönköping. Since 2015, Eskilstuna and Jönköping have been part of a pilot project titled “Model Municipalities,” which includes seven municipalities in Sweden selected on the basis of their successful work on gender mainstreaming. These two cases are significant because what does not work there is unlikely to work elsewhere. We focus on the output of the implementation process, particularly the views of street-level bureaucrats

on the main obstacles to the implementation of gender mainstreaming. Drawing on the literature on policy implementation, particularly the dimensions of comprehension, capacity, and will (Lundquist 1987), as well as the feminist literature on resistance (Mergaert and Lombardo 2014; Pincus 2002), implementation gaps with regard to gender mainstreaming are addressed.

The article is organized as follows. First, research on gender mainstreaming is presented. This is followed by a discussion of implementation theory and feminist institutional theory, which is used to outline an analytical framework for studying implementation gaps in gender mainstreaming. Thereafter, the data and methods used in the study are described, and an account of the context is presented. Next, the extent to which Swedish municipalities may be failing to implement the gender mainstreaming policies that they have adopted is examined, and the factors accounting for the outcomes are identified. Finally, the findings of the study are summarized, together with their implications for future policy work.

The article concludes that even in ideal contexts, such as those of model municipalities in Sweden, the implementation of policies that have great potential may be reduced to being merely cosmetic. In fact, the article reveals implicit and explicit resistance to gender mainstreaming at both the individual and institutional levels. The key obstacles to the implementation of gender mainstreaming — implicit resistance — are *complacency*, the perception that work on gender mainstreaming is satisfactory and that no extra attention to the matter is needed, and the *congestion of perspectives*, the fact that the gender equality perspective must compete with other relevant perspectives, a process in which gender equality is often the loser. Another obstacle is lack of political will. However, lack of political will, even in model municipalities, may be compensated for by formal rules and solid systems of governance. Hence, when there is a lack of political will and even resistance, a solid system of governance and management and a clear chain of command can contribute to the coherent and sustainable implementation of gender mainstreaming.

RESEARCH ON GENDER MAINSTREAMING

Although many countries have put gender mainstreaming policies in place, the policy of gender mainstreaming has been subject to intense debate in recent years. Practitioners and policy makers debate whether this

mechanism for achieving gender equality has succeeded or failed (Moser and Moser 2005). Scholars note that the implementation of gender mainstreaming remains inconsistent (Squires 2007; Walby 2004) and that the outcomes and impact of the implementation of gender mainstreaming in terms of gender equality remain largely unknown (Mergaert and Lombardo 2014). Variation in results has been attributed to the “fuzzy” and “contingent” nature of gender mainstreaming (Daly 2005), and the lack of definition of the goals of gender equality has turned gender mainstreaming into a kind of chameleon, changing colors with every social and political context (Verloo 2005). Central to many discussions is the vagueness of the concept of gender mainstreaming: sometimes it is not defined at all, and sometimes it is defined in different ways by different actors (Lombardo, Meier, and Verloo 2009). Progress in gender mainstreaming has also been described as integrationist rather than transformative. Gender mainstreaming has been added as an objective, sometimes contributing to changing gender issues in policies that are already in place, but problems with the underlying framework of organizations and their gender biases have often persisted (Hafner-Burton and Pollack 2009). The opposite views of the implementation of gender mainstreaming could be considered the consequence of variations in definition, interpretation, and context: integration versus agenda setting (Lombardo 2005; Verloo 2005), expert–bureaucratic versus participative–democratic (Beveridge, Nott, and Stephen 2000), and gender equality versus diverse equality (Squires 2007).

Scholars have criticized this policy for not achieving radical change, the starting point for a series of more recent studies. Ylösalo (2016), for instance, has examined the implementation of gender mainstreaming in the Finnish state administration and finds that the transformative potential of the strategy gets lost in the implementation process. Two main problems are highlighted: (1) gender mainstreaming is a difficult and complex concept, reflected in the limited knowledge of gender and gender equality on the part of officials, and (2) resistance to gender mainstreaming exists at the organizational level. According to Ylösalo (2016), the two problems are connected. When there is either limited or no knowledge about gender and gender equality, the goal of gender mainstreaming gets lost. When the ultimate goal of the policy gets lost, the result is a lack of commitment or resistance. Based on these results, two requirements for successful implementation of gender mainstreaming have been identified: (1) officials must have knowledge of gender mainstreaming, and (2) they must be involved in the practices.

Empirical studies from Sweden show a trend toward depoliticizing the implementation of gender mainstreaming (Alnebratt and Rönnblom 2016; Andersson 2015). For instance, the implementation of gender mainstreaming, like many other policy areas, has become professionalized and bureaucratized, incorporating contemporary management rhetoric, market principles, and tools of the New Public Management. The responsibility for determining what gender equality is and what is to be done has shifted from political to nonpolitical actors. Gender equality has become a question of methods and checklists for bureaucrats rather than of conflicting ideas, values, and opinions among politicians. The emphasis on gender mainstreaming policy tools has contributed to displacing — and even rendering invisible — the transformative feminist project that sustains this strategy (Alnebratt and Rönnblom 2016). Thus, feminism has been replaced by administration.

Studies from Sweden also reveal common problems in the implementation of gender mainstreaming: limited time and resources for integrating gender equality into the operations of an organization, as well as a lack of active support on the part of managers (Callerstig 2014; Lindholm et al. 2012). When management takes active ownership of the issue, the conditions for the successful implementation of gender mainstreaming improve. The active support of management also contributes to the sustainability of the work. Local “gender equality coaches” cannot by themselves contribute to the long-term work without this support (Sjöberg 2012). A study of gender mainstreaming in state agencies shows that among distinct tools of governance such as steering, leadership, and knowledge/resources, leadership is the only significant factor that contributes positively to successful implementation (Stensöta 2010). The implementation of gender equality policies in practice often meets resistance (Mergaert and Lombardo 2014; Pincus 2002). Gender equality policies usually question existing priorities and resource distribution, which makes the work particularly challenging. Also, as in the implementation of any policy, changes in the routines and work of organizations often lead to anxiety and distress. Resistance can thus be linked to the attitudes and values of individuals and the institutional features of organizations.

In sum, gender mainstreaming policies are in place in many organizations at the international, national, and local levels, but implementation remains inconsistent, problematic, and ineffective. We argue, therefore, that investigating gender policy *implementation* is crucial if we are to understand the factors and obstacles that influence

gender equality in specific contexts and institutional settings and why the results of progressive gender policies have yet to be seen. This approach is in line with the recent turn toward implementation in gender and policy research, which calls for a focus on the postadoption stage of gender equality policy (Engeli and Mazur 2018).

ANALYZING IMPLEMENTATION GAPS

A major area of interest in political science involves the so-called implementation gap: political decisions are not implemented as intended or are not accompanied by action in line with the decisions made. The main concern revolves around problems of implementing central-level decisions at the local level. The problem can be summarized by the subtitle of the book *Implementation* by Jeffrey Pressman and Aaron Wildavsky from 1975: “How great expectations in Washington are dashed in Oakland, or why it’s amazing that federal programs work at all.” Pressman and Wildavsky suggest in this subtitle that it is wrong to ask why all political decisions and policies are not implemented as planned. Instead, one should be “pleasantly surprised when a few good things really happen” (xii–xiii).

In implementation theory, three key dimensions for successful street-level policy implementation have been proposed: comprehension, capacity, and will (Lundqvist 1987). The first dimension involves *comprehension*: the implementer needs to understand the policy to be implemented and the rules, regulations, and guidelines linked to the policy. That the implementer does not understand how to implement the policy does not necessarily mean that he or she is inept or lacks relevant qualifications. Rather, the policy may be unclear or difficult to interpret, as are many EU directives. Many decisions are also the result of compromises, and policy documents often suffer by being too vague and too general, and therefore they are interpreted in different ways. However, sometimes the implementer may not be particularly well versed in the laws and regulations that set the goals for the operations. He or she may, therefore, find it more convenient to use routines that have been applied and developed locally.

The second dimension involves the *capacity* to implement a policy: the implementer needs to have resources, including financial resources, technical equipment, personnel, as well as time to implement the policy as intended. For obvious reasons, it is difficult to implement a policy if

sufficient resources are not provided, if the time frame is too limited, or if the available staff is insufficient.

The third dimension involves the *will* to implement a policy: the implementer must have an interest in and a willingness to implement the policy and achieve the objectives. There can, of course, be many reasons for not wanting to execute a decision and implement a policy. It does not necessarily have to do with conscious sabotage or harm; it could also be the result of the implementer wanting to protect those who will be (negatively) affected by the policy.

These three dimensions are connected. For instance, if there are scarce resources (capacity), interest in implementing a policy may be low (will), given the anticipated implementation problems and risks of negative results. If there is limited access to information and skills training (comprehension), the ability to understand the government guidelines may be limited, which, in turn, can negatively affect the implementation of the policy, regardless of access to funding, personnel, or technical equipment (capacity). Lack of information or guidelines that are difficult to understand (comprehension) may also constitute an argument for those who are opposed to the policy (will). If there is lack of interest (will), the implementation of the policy may be unsuccessful, regardless of access to financial resources (capacity) and trained personnel (comprehension).

Feminist institutionalism complements implementation theory by adding a gender perspective and studying resistance in the actual implementation of gender equality policies (Cavaghan 2017; Mackay 2014; Mergaert and Lombardo 2014). According to feminist institutionalism, institutions comprise formal and informal gendered structures, practices, and norms, which also have gendered effects. Institutions are also nested; they are shaped not only by interactions with prevailing institutions but also by gendered institutional legacies of the past. Old rules, practices, and norms tend to linger, and new formal rules may be “actively resisted” or “passively neglected” (Mackay 2014, 550–51). Hence, in implementation processes, new formal rules interact with old formal and informal rules, practices, and norms. The power and norms of dominant groups within an institution often hinder or resist new practices and norms, especially if those norms aim to change the gendered power relations in society (Mackay 2014).

Drawing on feminist institutionalism, Mergaert and Lombardo (2014) distinguish between individual and institutional resistance, each of which can be expressed implicitly and explicitly. *Implicit individual*

resistance may manifest as an individual's inaction or inadequate action toward gender equality, while *explicit individual resistance* is expressed as an individual's overt opposition. *Implicit institutional resistance* is a systematic pattern of individual resistance expressed as inaction or inadequate action at the collective level. *Explicit institutional resistance* refers to overt opposition to gender equality at the collective and systemic levels. In a similar way, Pincus (2002) distinguishes between passive and active resistance. For instance, gender equality may never be placed on the agenda and hence never be addressed (i.e., *passive resistance* expressed as *silence*). Sometimes gender equality is included on the agenda but not provided with sufficient prerequisites to be achieved (i.e., *passive resistance* expressed as *pseudo action*). In the words of Pincus, "a plan can be drawn up, a gender equality committee set up, a gender equality ombudsman appointed without this leading to either legitimacy or action" (1997, 17). In addition, gender equality initiatives may be openly resisted by statements that more important issues must be given priority (i.e., *active resistance* in the form of *counterarguments*) or even weakened, undercut, and delegitimized by the withdrawal of resources or the recruitment of less qualified personnel (i.e., *active resistance* in the form of *undermining*).

In sum, the implementation gap refers to the difference between the policies adopted at a central level — in this case, the policy of gender mainstreaming adopted at the top at the municipal level — and what is implemented in practice by street-level bureaucrats in the operations of municipalities. Based on previous research on implementation, we argue that gender policy implementation gaps can best be understood as emerging from the interaction of two interrelated factors: individual barriers and institutional barriers. *Individual barriers* relate to the ways in which individual factors, such as personal values, attitudes, and preferences, affect the behavior of implementers and thus contribute to creating implementation gaps. *Institutional barriers* relate to the structural incentives guiding the implementation process, including political, organizational, and economic factors. These two interlacing factors are, in turn, affected by three dimensions: comprehension, capacity, and will. Drawing on feminist institutional research, we add an additional aspect: resistance. Since gender norms also matter for the implementation of policies, including resistance to transformative gender equality policies, *gender barriers* operating at both the individual and institutional levels may also affect policy implementation.

METHODS

The analysis of the implementation of gender mainstreaming at the local level in Sweden is based on data from two cases: the municipalities of Eskilstuna and Jönköping. Eskilstuna and Jönköping were part of one of the largest gender equality projects in Sweden: the Program for Sustainable Gender Equality (HÅJ), which aimed at improving citizens' access to public services at the municipal level in a gender-equal way. The program was initiated by the Swedish government and implemented by the Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions (SALAR) in almost 50 municipalities across the country during 2008–13. Since 2015, Eskilstuna and Jönköping have been part of the pilot project “Model Municipalities,” comprising seven municipalities in Sweden that were identified as outstanding in the field of gender equality.

The two cases are similar with regard to key variables such as size, type of industry, and socioeconomic standards. They are categorized by SALAR as larger cities (more than 100,000 inhabitants) and dominated by the metal industry (Eskilstuna) and enterprise (Jönköping). The Social Democratic Party has been the dominant political player in Eskilstuna. However, since 2014, a coalition between the Social Democratic Party, the Moderate Party, and the Centre Party has been in charge. A coalition between the Social Democratic Party and the Centre Party has dominated politics in Jönköping. Since 2006, however, a coalition of parties on the center and the Right parties has been running the municipality.

This study is based on a content analysis of key policy documents, including gender equality action plans, strategy plans, and annual plans, which are central in the governance and steering of the municipalities, and on a series of semistructured interviews with 10 key actors in politics and the public administration, including the chairpersons of the municipal executive boards, central process leaders, and local process leaders. The interviews were conducted in the spring of 2017.

We argue that the Swedish experience, as well as the experiences of the two model municipalities, is relevant in analyzing gender mainstreaming. With a focus on Sweden as a likely case, it should be possible to identify positive results of the implementation of gender mainstreaming, as well as to shed light on the major weaknesses and limitations in the implementation of the strategy. In this comparison of two successful municipalities, the primary focus is on the major barriers to effective implementation of gender mainstreaming.

Sweden has 290 municipalities, each of which has an elected assembly, a municipal council that makes decisions on municipal matters. It appoints the municipal executive board, which is headed by an executive chair, who leads and coordinates municipal work. The municipal council has substantial political power, both through direct taxation and through control over public spending. Together, the municipal councils control more than one-fourth of Swedish gross domestic product and employ one-fourth of the labor force in Sweden. Municipalities also have a constitutional right to local self-government. In addition, under paragraph 2.1 of the Swedish Local Government Act of 1991, the local authorities are responsible for matters of public interest related to the municipal council and the municipality's inhabitants, which are not the exclusive responsibility of the state.

SALAR represents the governmental, professional, and employer-related interests of Sweden's 290 local municipalities, 18 county councils, and two regions. During 2008–13, SALAR was granted 250 million SEK (~US\$27.8 million) by the government for the HAJ program to support the work of integrating the gender equality perspective into all decision-making (i.e., gender mainstreaming). In 2015, SALAR introduced the Model Municipalities project to improve the implementation of gender mainstreaming in municipalities by systematically comparing working methods (benchmarking). Seven municipalities were selected to take part in the project; two of these were Eskilstuna and Jönköping. More specifically, the project aimed at disseminating knowledge, experiences, and best practices related to gender mainstreaming in different municipal administrative organs and activities. The project has encouraged more municipalities to work on gender mainstreaming, contributed to sustainable gender equality through a systematic learning approach, and improved the quality of municipal activities by ensuring equal access to public services to residents regardless of gender. In 2017, the project was extended to cover 21 municipalities.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In this section, the major results are presented and analyzed. The analysis comprises a detailed comparative micro-study of the implementation of gender mainstreaming in two model municipalities: Eskilstuna and Jönköping. First, we investigate the formal organization, including the institutional infrastructure, the instruments and tools used, the network

of actors involved in implementation, as well as the resources dedicated to the process. Next, we focus on the informal aspects by studying the implementation gaps pertaining to the dimensions of comprehension, capacity, and will. Finally, we focus on resistance to implementation.

Infrastructure, Instruments, and Network

To examine implementation gaps, we first need to map the formal organization of the governance of gender mainstreaming. In both Eskilstuna and Jönköping, an institutional infrastructure is in place, as well as instruments and tools for the implementation of gender mainstreaming and a network of actors.

In Eskilstuna, two political bodies are responsible for gender equality work. The Gender Equality Board was established in 2007 and is a permanent board under the Municipal Executive Board. It functions as an arm of the Municipal Executive Board and is responsible for promoting and monitoring gender equality and ensuring that gender equality is integrated into the operations of the municipality. The board submits a report to the Executive Board once per year, with proposals for improving gender equality work, and it functions as a sounding board when strategic documents are being drawn up. The Gender Mainstreaming Board was established when the municipality joined the HAJ program in 2008, and it is headed by the chair of the Municipal Executive Board. It meets twice per year to discuss the implementation of gender mainstreaming, the remaining challenges, and how to tackle them.

In Jönköping, responsibility for gender mainstreaming is placed on all administrative departments and divisions, which means there is no specific gender equality board. Politically, the Management Committee of the Executive Board, headed by the Executive Board chair, is responsible for gender equality as a policy area, for conducting regular follow-ups and assessments, and for requesting reports and results on the implementation of gender mainstreaming. Political decision-making bodies, such as boards and committees, are responsible for presenting an annual action plan within their specific areas of work, including lists of actions that have been followed up, analyzed, and evaluated.

At the administrative level, there are three key positions in the two municipalities: (1) a central process leader, (2) local process leaders, and (3) a network of local process leaders. The *central process leader* is placed at the head office of the municipality, and his or her main task is

to lead and coordinate the overall work of mainstreaming gender equality into the operations of the municipality. This leader monitors, evaluates, and follows up the work of integrating gender into the operations of various administrative departments in the municipality and submits an annual report to the municipal council. The leader has regular contact with public authorities, other municipalities, civil society organizations, and women's shelters (interview, central process leader, Jönköping). The central process leader also represents the municipality on the county gender equality committee. The work includes "providing assistance and support in the development of gender mainstreaming, offering education and creating possibilities for collaboration and exchange of experiences" (Jönköpings kommun 2015).

The *local process leaders* are responsible for coordinating gender mainstreaming activities in administrative departments. They also work with civil society organizations within the framework of joint projects. For instance, in Eskilstuna, the process leader of the Department of Culture organized the project "Photovoice," in which girls from socioeconomically weak areas were invited to take photographs of their residential areas and formulate proposals for how safety could be improved in those areas. In Jönköping, the Department of Education collaborates with the local women's shelter on projects contributing to increased knowledge on the part of staff members about men's violence against women. The local process leaders are part of a network of local process leaders that meets on a regular basis to exchange information and share best practices. The network provides the local process leaders with opportunities for support, learning, and reflection (interview, central process leader, Eskilstuna).

In addition to these central positions and arenas, gender equality is a topic in the dialogues between politicians and administration management. In the dialogue in Eskilstuna – comprising leaders of political bodies and administrative departments and representatives of the Gender Equality Board – discussion and exchange of experiences are stimulated that ultimately compel management to ensure that gender mainstreaming is implemented within its remit. In the annual budget dialogue in Jönköping, politicians ask management to describe the main challenges in their departments and the ways in which these challenges can be tackled. According to our interviews, the dialogues send an important signal to management that political bodies are interested in the ways in which a gender equality perspective can improve the operations of the departments, thereby creating a push from above.

In both municipalities, gender equality is integrated into the systems and processes for governance and steering, and certain tools for gender mainstreaming are in place. One such tool is the Council of European Regions and Municipalities (CEMR) Charter for Equality between Women and Men, to which both Eskilstuna and Jönköping are signatories. The CEMR declaration is a tool for municipalities, county councils, and regions to integrate the gender perspective into political decision-making and practical activities. The intention is to ensure compliance with discrimination legislation and the implementation of principles governed by international agreements in practice at the local and regional levels. Another tool is gender action plans (GAPs). In the GAP for Eskilstuna, “Gender mainstreaming implies that decisions within all policy areas are to be permeated by a gender equality perspective. That means that gender equality is to be treated within the framework of the regular structures and decision-making processes” (Eskilstuna kommun 2016).

The GAP for Eskilstuna also emphasizes that it is important to make visible “who gets what, on what conditions, and why” and that an awareness of the “unequal distribution of power between women and men” is needed in the analysis of political decisions in order to identify effective measures (Eskilstuna kommun 2016, 7). In the GAP for Jönköping, the concept of gender mainstreaming is described as follows:

In order to achieve a gender equal society a gender equality perspective is to be integrated into all areas of society. This strategy is gender mainstreaming. In short, gender mainstreaming means that a gender equality perspective is to be incorporated into all operations and activities, into all parts of decisions-making, planning and performance of operations. (Jönköpings kommun 2015, 7)

The aim of gender mainstreaming is to “improve operations, increase quality and ensure that resources are allocated equally between women and men, boys and girls” (Jönköpings kommun 2015, 7). For gender mainstreaming to be effective, knowledge about women’s and men’s conditions in society is needed, as well as knowledge about the ways in which norms and values affect the identity and situation of individuals (Jönköpings kommun 2015, 7).

In addition to GAPs, work on gender equality is regulated in key steering documents of the municipalities, such as annual plans and strategy plans. For instance, in the “Annual Plan for Eskilstuna 2016,” all administrative departments are to allocate resources for gender mainstreaming, and all

departments must have a plan regarding the ways in which they will tackle inequalities between women and men that have been detected in mappings and analyses of their operations (Eskilstuna kommun 2016, 10). Similarly, the “Strategy Plan of Eskilstuna” (2015) stipulates that the implementation of gender mainstreaming and its effects are to be monitored, assessed, and followed up three times per year. Indicators have been developed to measure the fulfillment of objectives.

A key tool in integrating gender into the operations of the municipalities is gender-disaggregated statistics, which means that all statistics presented in steering documents need to be broken down by sex and then described and analyzed from a gender perspective. Educational activities and methodological support also play an important part in the work of gender mainstreaming. The ways in which this work is organized vary; every department designs its own GAP in which the objectives and activities are tailored to the needs of that department.

Eskilstuna and Jönköping do not differ significantly regarding the governance of gender mainstreaming. Gender equality has a prominent place in the organization of the two municipalities; it is prioritized by the political leadership, and the administration is given a mandate to work with it. Similar bodies and actors are part of the steering and command chain, including political decision-making bodies headed by the executive council chair, administrative managers, central process leaders, and local process leaders (gender equality experts) supporting the implementation process and, finally, civil servants that implement the strategies. The municipalities differ in the sense that in Eskilstuna, there is a specific gender equality body attached to the Executive Council chair. In Jönköping, there is no specific gender equality body. Instead, it has been merged into one body that deals with several policy areas, including gender equality.

Moreover, gender mainstreaming is implemented in the regular operations of the two municipalities. Consequently, the concrete work of integrating gender equality into the regular work and processes is part of the tasks of the regular personnel in the administrative departments. Ultimate responsibility for implementing gender mainstreaming rests with the management of these administrative departments. To ensure that gender mainstreaming is implemented in an effective and proper way, support functions have been developed. At the central level, the central process leader is responsible for the overall work of gender mainstreaming in the municipality, and at the local level — in the administrative departments — local process leaders support the

management of administrative departments in the work of implementing gender mainstreaming. Hence, there is a dual structure: a structure for the implementation of gender mainstreaming in the regular operations of the municipality and a structure of gender expertise, in which femocrats support the management at the administrative level and ensure that the gender equality perspective does not disappear in the regular work and processes. Thus, the system of steering and chain of command are relatively distinct.

In addition, the two municipalities have adopted tools for the application of gender mainstreaming. GAPs have been established, gender statistics are used to identify gaps and systems of monitoring, and processes for follow-up and evaluation are in place. Increased awareness of gender equality for the purpose of combating inequalities has been promoted through seminars and workshops for staff members, managers, and politicians. Thus, the basic formal rules and prerequisites for the implementation of gender mainstreaming are in place.

Implementation Gaps

We approach the informal aspects of the implementation process by analyzing major obstacles and barriers. For gender mainstreaming to be implemented effectively, actors responsible for gender mainstreaming need to understand what is to be implemented (*comprehension*). In both Eskilstuna and Jönköping, informants claim that knowledge of gender equality and awareness of persistent inequalities are important aspects of the work with gender mainstreaming. The level of knowledge among politicians, managers, and civil servants is generally believed to be high, although the degree of knowledge varies (interview, central process leader, Eskilstuna), and they know that gender mainstreaming is to be implemented (interview, central process leader, Jönköping). In Eskilstuna, extensive capacity-building activities and training for politicians, managers, and civil servants have been conducted, and civil servants were even invited to propose activities to be conducted within the framework of the HÅJ program (interview, central process leader, Eskilstuna). Hence, the activities that were eventually chosen emanated from those who were supposed to implement them, which, in turn, created a form of ownership. In Jönköping, various measures within the framework of the HÅJ program, such as workshops and seminars, resulted in increased knowledge and awareness among managers and politicians (interview, central process leader, Jönköping).

In the practical work with gender mainstreaming, challenges remain – particularly qualitative work, such as the step from presenting gender-disaggregated statistics to analyzing them. The central process leader in Eskilstuna notes that, despite support and various workshops on how to analyze statistics and make gender impact analyses, civil servants still have problems examining systematic gender differences and analyzing the gendered consequences of these differences (interview, central process leader, Eskilstuna). The central process leader in Jönköping reveals that sometimes no statistics are provided and that sometimes gender-disaggregated statistics are presented but without any comments or analysis (interview, central process leader, Jönköping). Often, gender mainstreaming is transformed into methods and checklists, not into the integration of a gender equality perspective with the aim of transforming society: “In our yearly follow-ups, there is just a ‘yes.’ There is hardly ever an analysis of the activities reported in the follow up” (interview, central process leader, Jönköping).

Knowledge among political representatives differs. In Eskilstuna, political boards that are clearly motivated and knowledgeable about gender equality require the administration to provide data and results (interview, central process leader, Eskilstuna). At the same time, political boards with weak leadership and more limited knowledge tend to give lower priority to gender equality, which puts the central process leader in a position in which he or she needs to be the key driving force (interview, central process leader, Eskilstuna). In Jönköping, many staff members find it difficult to perform qualitative analyses due to the complexity of the methods (interview, central process leader, Jönköping). General workshops on gender mainstreaming have, therefore, been supplemented with specialized courses in gender equality assessment. However, as noted by informants, when there is no demand for these analyses (on the part of managers or politicians), which is often the case, the incentive to improve the analytical work is limited (interview, central process leader, Jönköping).

Hence, in both Eskilstuna and Jönköping, gender mainstreaming is regarded as a complex concept, creating problems for civil servants in relation to tasks such as analyzing gender-disaggregated statistics and understanding the potential causes and effects of gender mainstreaming. As noted in previous research, a lack of deeper knowledge of gender and gender equality may contribute to difficulties in achieving the national gender equality objectives, thus undermining the transformative potential of gender mainstreaming (Callerstig 2014; Ylösalo 2016). These problems also present a challenge in terms of implementation

theory, which claims that it is essential to have an understanding of the measures and of the relationship between causes and effects (Rothstein 2002, 91).

For gender mainstreaming to be implemented as intended, resources must be available in terms of money, time, and staff (*capacity*). In Eskilstuna, gender equality is a politically and administratively prioritized matter, even in financial terms, even though Eskilstuna is not an affluent municipality (interview, executive committee chair, Eskilstuna). Money for gender equality is allocated through regular funds for internal development; thus, no funding is earmarked for gender equality. Although gender equality is prioritized, the administrative departments in Eskilstuna differ in the number of staff members assigned to work with gender mainstreaming and the ways in which the work is conducted. For instance, the Department of Culture has assigned a relatively large group of personnel to work with gender mainstreaming, but the Department of Children and Youth has been criticized for allocating rather few staff members to gender mainstreaming work in relation to its size and budget. Although some administrative departments educate all of their staff members in the field of gender equality, others have decided only to educate managers (interview, central process leader, Eskilstuna).

In Jönköping, no specific money is allocated for this purpose, since gender mainstreaming is part of the regular work and operations of the municipality. Rather, each administrative department must allocate funds for this work. Furthermore, targeted measures and projects have generally been opted out of, as they are not considered sustainable (interviews, central process leader, Executive Board Chair, Jönköping). Factors contributing to successful implementation of gender mainstreaming, such as attitudes and values, do not necessarily require a substantial amount of money; there is instead a need for committed staff members to implement the policy (interview, executive board chair, Jönköping). As in Eskilstuna, informants in Jönköping pointed to the importance of organizational factors in implementation processes. A large administrative department, such as the Department of Education, with more than 5,000 employees, may have difficulties reaching out to each staff member and educating them in gender mainstreaming methods (interview, local process leader, Jönköping). For smaller departments, such as the Department of Emergency Services, it is easier to promote training, especially since there has been substantial political pressure to develop this sector.

Comparing the two municipalities, access to financial resources appears to be important, though not crucial, in the implementation of gender mainstreaming. Rather, access to personnel and time, which, in turn, influence the prospects of conducting systematic work, seems to be more important than underbudgeting. Large administrative departments with large pools of civil servants have greater problems in reaching out in the organization compared with smaller ones, and implementation thus becomes uneven throughout the organization. Problems related to understaffing and insufficient access to personnel are apparent in both cases. These results are in line with previous research on implementation of gender equality, which has shown that a common problem is a lack of resources and time, partly linked to organizational conditions (Callerstig 2014; Lindholm et al. 2012).

For gender mainstreaming to be implemented as intended, there must be an interest in implementing it (i.e., *will*). Local process leaders in Eskilstuna claim that pressure from above (i.e., from politicians, management and the central process leader) is crucial for gender mainstreaming to be properly implemented. In the view of one local process leader: “Pressure from above and visibility in steering documents is necessary for the implementation of gender mainstreaming. [Gender equality] must be requested; persons — the top management and the central process leader — must demand it” (interview, local process leader, Eskilstuna).

Support from the political leadership is also important for local process leaders (interview, local process leader, Eskilstuna). In their practical work, they can refer to the support of key politicians and to statements in key steering documents. The inclusion of gender equality objectives in these documents is important in terms of sustainability. With the existence of formal rules, implementation is less vulnerable to changes in government and changes in staff. Informants in Jönköping, on the contrary, reveal a lack of interest in gender equality among politicians and report that leaders at the middle management level have little time to promote gender equality work, being caught in a system in which many objectives need to be achieved and priorities established (interview, local process leader, Jönköping). In the absence of forceful political and managerial demands, as noted earlier, there is a need for committed staff members to implement the policy (interview, executive board chair, Jönköping).

Comparing the municipalities, Eskilstuna has high ambitions with regard to gender equality and strong demands from politicians, who

pressure management to deliver data and results. In Jönköping, there is no such direct political pressure for change. In fact, in Jönköping, there seems to be a noticeable lack of demands on the part of politicians and even managers. There, the local process leaders promote gender equality and exert pressure for change; the top-down pressure is limited.

Importantly, those given the task of implementing gender mainstreaming must be willing to do it (Callerstig 2014; Yläsalö 2016). Previous research stresses that responsibility for integrating gender equality into the operations and processes of an organization cannot be assigned to individual staff members or be a task solely for gender equality experts. Staff members in the administrations and local process leaders seldom have the mandate needed to influence decision-making. The task of integrating gender equality may be concentrated among a few enthusiasts, and the work may not have the impact it would have if management took “active ownership” of the matter (cf. Sjöberg 2012, 47). Hence, support from management to ensure that the matter is given high priority, that time is allocated for development work, and that resources are made available are crucial for implementation to be successful (Stensöta 2010). Learning then becomes dependent on organizational capacity, not individual capacity (Callerstig 2014).

Resistance to Implementing Gender Mainstreaming

The fact that there is a formal organization, with a gender equality infrastructure, femocrats, and a committed staff, does not imply that no obstacles are impeding the implementation of gender equality. In this final section, we discuss resistance to gender mainstreaming in the two municipalities. Process leaders claim that there is little resistance to gender mainstreaming. However, a closer look at the interviews reveals clear indications of both explicit (overt) and implicit (covert) resistance, as well as active and passive resistance, operating at the individual and institutional levels in the two municipalities.

In Eskilstuna, there is strong support for gender mainstreaming, and work with gender equality is generally related to status and pride (interviews, local process leaders, Eskilstuna). However, although a formal political decision to implement gender mainstreaming has been made, civil servants sometimes neglect implementing parts of it (interview, local process leader, Eskilstuna). These instances of neglect are often explained by *complacency*, that is, claims that gender

mainstreaming has already been implemented, that gender equality has already been achieved, and that no further measures are needed. A recurrent theme is also the *congestion of perspectives*, that a great number of perspectives must be mainstreamed into the operations of the administrations, ranging from gender, diversity, and disability to children and the environment. If several perspectives are considered, perspectives involving children and the environment are normally given priority. Informants claim that civil servants generally prefer to deal with one or, perhaps, two perspectives (interview, local process leader, Eskilstuna). Informants also stress that resistance is primarily found among certain individuals and that it can often be linked to a lack of knowledge.

In Jönköping, political bodies and top management are influential in the work of integrating gender into the operations of the municipality. However, when detailing this position, signs of complacency are revealed in terms of limited political and managerial demands and a lack of ambition. One process leader maintained the following: “It is not politicians who demand that measures be taken and who put the administration against the wall, in this matter. Rather, it is the administration and often the gender equality expert who claim that these are important issues that need to be tackled. The pressure does not come from politicians; quite the contrary, it comes from the gender equality machinery” (interview, central process leader, Jönköping).

As this quote indicates, politicians and managers do not refuse to accept or comply with policies of gender mainstreaming. However, they are not necessarily committed to the task, and the pressure for change comes from below (i.e., from femocrats), not from above. This result is also reflected in the *Gender Equality Report*, which was submitted to SALAR within the framework of the Model Municipalities project (Jönköpings kommun 2015, 10). A local process leader points to the lack of demands on the part of the political board: “When we report our activities, the board is quite satisfied, but they have, like, no suggestions on new activities, or any ideas about work in other fields or improvements of any parts of prevalent work” (interview, local process leader, Jönköping).

In a similar vein, another local process leader reports that there is a lack of involvement among top management and that local process leaders need to be very persistent if any work is to be done. Although managers are fully aware that “it is not ok to say that you do not want to work with it [gender mainstreaming],” they “do not take any initiatives and do not take advantage of the competence I can contribute with” (interview, local process leader, Jönköping). The lack of interest among civil servants has

also been noted. One local process leader claims that the department has experienced difficulties in recruiting staff members to participate in gender equality work. Gender equality has become a “nonissue,” since “it works fine as it is” (interview, local process leader, Jönköping).

As in Eskilstuna, a key problem in Jönköping is the many objectives and perspectives that public servants must consider, ranging from those related to children to those related to disabled people. When many perspectives need to be considered, the implementation of gender equality suffers. When conflicting interests are at play, follow-ups are crucial: “Follow-ups are important. The system of steering and governance is important in these follow-ups. Then middle-managers and other managers must show top management in the municipality how you have worked with these issues, what analyses you have done and what conclusions you draw. As a manager, you must present something” (interview, central process leader, Jönköping).

Although informants in both Eskilstuna and Jönköping claim there is no apparent resistance to implementing gender mainstreaming, discernible signs of both explicit and implicit resistance are evident at the individual and institutional levels, involving comprehension, capacity, and will. With regard to *comprehension*, some individuals do not perceive gender equality as a problem; it is considered to work fine as it is, and therefore no action is needed. Gender equality has become a nonissue. Similarly, politicians and managers seldom have ideas about how to develop gender mainstreaming or any suggestions for further measures to be taken (i.e., passive resistance, silence). These are examples of implicit individual resistance or passive resistance (i.e., silence). The existence of multiple and sometimes conflicting perspectives that are to be integrated into the operations of the municipality is often emphasized as a major barrier to the implementation of gender mainstreaming. This observation might, at first glance, not be considered an act of resistance. However, implementers often have to consider several perspectives simultaneously while juggling many other demands, which often results in perspectives other than gender equality being prioritized. This phenomenon can be regarded as an expression of explicit institutional resistance or active resistance (counter arguments).

With regard to *capacity*, we observe implicit resistance at the individual and institutional levels. Although formal rules and an advanced infrastructure are in place, with adequate funding, staffing, and training, the competence of the process leaders and their specific gender expertise is not taken advantage of. This indirectly undercuts the validity of their work, which can be

interpreted as active resistance (i.e., undermining). Neglecting their competence may be interpreted as a form of implicit institutional resistance, by not giving staff members sufficient training and by indirectly undermining the legitimacy of gender experts.

With regard to *will*, finally, we find implicit resistance at the individual level. It is expressed primarily in terms of a lack of demand, interest, and visions among political leaders, managers, and staff members. In general, it may be concluded that if there is a lack of will among those who are to implement a strategy, it is crucial that the steering and managerial systems work. In the two municipalities, systematic and regular monitoring and follow-ups are conducted, and there is a system of clear responsibilities, routines, and safeguards.

Previous research also emphasizes the need for a formal organization of governance that supports implementation (Callerstig 2014). The establishment of such support structures in Eskilstuna and Jönköping, with an institutional infrastructure, instruments and tools, and a network of actors, including gender experts as facilitators, may be one reason why these two municipalities have been able to advance their work on gender mainstreaming. The recruitment of gender experts — the femocrats — can also be seen as a way of incorporating an element of learning into the process and of combining a top-down system of steering and governance with a system of learning and participation.

CONCLUSION

In this article, the implementation of gender mainstreaming in two Swedish model municipalities — Eskilstuna and Jönköping — has been investigated, with an explicit focus on barriers and obstacles to the implementation process. Although comprehensive work on the implementation of gender mainstreaming has been pursued, these two successful municipalities face challenges, and their formal policies have not necessarily resulted in positive implementation.

The two municipalities are similar in many respects in terms of the implementation of gender mainstreaming: a comprehensive gender equality infrastructure is in place, gender has been integrated into the regular operations of each of the municipalities, and support functions composed of in-house experts have been established to assist in the implementation process. Clear steering and managerial systems and chains of command have been established.

Although the municipalities are similar in many ways in the implementation of gender mainstreaming, they differ in output in at least two respects. First, there are differences regarding the organization of gender mainstreaming. In Eskilstuna, a specific gender equality body has been assigned to monitor and follow up the implementation of gender mainstreaming. In Jönköping, gender equality matters are merged into one body that is responsible for several policy areas. Second, there are differences pertaining to political will. In Eskilstuna, a strong political driving force demands results and creates pressure. In Jönköping, the forces for change are primarily enthusiastic staff members and local process leaders. Hence, gender equality seems to be prioritized to a greater extent in Eskilstuna than in Jönköping.

In terms of major impediments to implementation, both of the municipalities have problems related to the dimensions of comprehension, capacity, and will. First, in relation to comprehension, gender mainstreaming is a difficult concept in both of the municipalities, creating problems in tasks such as analyzing gender-disaggregated statistics. This problem may indeed contribute to difficulties in achieving gender equality objectives, thereby undermining the transformative potential of gender mainstreaming. Second, in relation to capacity, staff members in the two municipalities seem to have sufficient resources for implementing gender mainstreaming. At the same time, however, there are perceptions that gender inequalities are best combatted through attitudinal change and increased efforts on the part of staff members, not through increased resources in terms of money and personnel. This result is problematic, since responsibility for policy implementation risks is placed on the personal inclination and competence of individuals who may lack both the mandate and sufficient resources for achieving the goals. Third, in relation to will, there is active support for gender mainstreaming in Eskilstuna and an apparent lack of support in Jönköping. The lack of support on the part of politicians, managers, and staff members, which has become visible in this study, shows that even progressive municipalities face difficulties in implementing gender mainstreaming.

Although there has not been any overt opposition to gender mainstreaming in the two municipalities, there are palpable examples of implicit and explicit resistance, at the individual level as well as the institutional level. Both passive and active resistance are at play – particularly silence, counter arguments, and undermining. Complacency (the view that the system works fine as it is or that gender equality has already been achieved) is a key obstacle. Also, the gender equality

perspective must compete with other relevant perspectives (a congestion of perspectives) in which gender equality is often the loser.

Taken together, this study contributes to the literature on policy implementation, demonstrating how gaps in comprehension, capacity, and will and their interrelations impede the implementation process. It also contributes to engendering the implementation literature. Moreover, the study contributes to feminist institutionalism by studying how formal rules, such as gender mainstreaming, interact with informal rules, practices, and norms on the ground, revealing obvious gendered tensions and flaws, even in municipalities that have been identified as forerunners in gender equality. If major barriers exist in these model settings, they are likely to appear elsewhere. By exploring the limits of implementation in a best-case scenario and by its focus on resistance, this study also contributes to our understanding of the gendered barriers and obstacles to affecting change and, ultimately, of the challenges to achieving gender transformation.

On a positive note, when there is a lack of political will and even examples of resistance, a solid steering and managerial system and a clear chain of command can contribute to coherent and sustainable implementation of gender mainstreaming, albeit not perfect in all stages or processes of implementation. Although political will continues to be crucial in the implementation of gender mainstreaming, this study shows that lack of political will can be compensated for, at least to some extent, by a solid system of governance.

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