

Gender Mainstreaming in the European Union

Towards a New Conception and Practice of Equal Opportunities?

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ABSTRACT This article aims to make a contribution to the conceptualization of mainstreaming gender equality promoted by the European Union. It starts by exploring the historical periodization of equal opportunities delivery strategies and challenging the compartmentalization of these developments. It suggests that equality policies can better be conceptualized in terms of a 'three-legged equality stool', which recognizes the interconnectiveness of three perspectives – the equal treatment perspective, the women's perspective and the gender perspective. The article argues that the gender perspective has been closely associated with strategies for mainstreaming gender equality, but that this association is misleading. As a result mainstreaming has remained a 'fuzzy' concept, which in turn has led to many different styles and forms of practical implementation in European member states.

KEY WORDS equal opportunities policies ♦ gender mainstreaming

INTRODUCTION

Mainstreaming is the policy adopted by the European Union (EU) to 'promote equality between men and women in all activities and policies at all levels' (COM (96) 67 final). Although mainstreaming as a policy has

been developed to advance gender equality, it is equally accessible and applicable to other areas of inequality and indeed to any form or scale of organization. To date the European Commission (EC) has played, and continues to play, a pivotal role in putting mainstreaming equality onto the political policy agenda of member states and of explaining the process of implementation. The development of mainstreaming as a strategy faces two tasks for effective implementation. First, there is the need to identify the necessary elements of the strategy in user-friendly management terms, such as the resources, time and organizational structures required. Second, analysis is needed to describe the context that can support a mainstreaming strategy which inspires, motivates and fundamentally changes formal and informal systems within organizations (Bennett et al., 1998).

These two tasks began in 1996 as the European Commission, through its Fourth Medium Term Community Action Programme for Equal Opportunities for Women and Men (1996–2000) funded investigative projects into mainstreaming. For example, the study into mainstreaming equality in local government structures, carried out in 1997 by the UK Equal Opportunities Commission (EOC, 1997). The European Commission has also closely observed initiatives to implement mainstreaming in member states, for example those undertaken by the Association of Local Government Swedish Authorities (SALA, n.d.) under the umbrella of the Mainstreaming Project of the Nordic Council of Ministers. In parallel, the Council of Europe established a group of specialists on mainstreaming, which produced its findings in 1998 (Council of Europe, 1998). These findings have informed and developed the European Commission's conceptualization of mainstreaming, and have been fed into the process of Union enlargement and subsequent policy formulation. Most significantly, the Treaty of Amsterdam (1998) reinforced the use of positive action programmes, such as the Community Action Programmes, by underpinning them with a commitment to mainstreaming equal opportunities throughout all the Union's activities. The Treaty moved equal opportunities on from a focus on equal pay to become a central objective of EU political commitment. Equal treatment between women and men now represents a fundamental right enshrined in EU law. This has led to new legislation in member states on equal pay, equal treatment, parental leave and maternity rights, sexual harassment at work and protection of part-time and fixed-term and contracted work.

The Fifth Community Framework Strategy on Gender Equality (2001–6) aims to coordinate the different mainstreaming initiatives and equality programmes under a single umbrella built around clear monitoring procedures. Funding to develop a horizontal mainstreaming strategy will be delivered by the Fifth Community Action Programme. The European Commission's adoption of a gender mainstreaming strategy in its internal working has provided another arena where good

practice is being pioneered. From 2000, a commitment to gender mainstreaming was incorporated into the funding regulations for the Structural Funds and also the Framework Programme sponsoring research and technical development. This spreads the requirement to mainstream gender to organizations whose core activity has not previously been focused on equal opportunities advancement.

Despite the European Commission central commitment and propagation of a gender mainstreaming strategy, it can be argued that literature theorizing mainstreaming is still at a rudimentary stage. Discussions of gender mainstreaming have been informed by feminist theory (Cockburn, 1991), theories of organizational practice (Rees, 1998) and social movement theory (Pollack and Hafner-Burton, 2000). However, there has as yet been insufficient academic and practitioner accounts of mainstreaming equality to stimulate a debate that is rich in detail, insightful and able to generate its own momentum. This article is a response to the findings of a research project 'Criteria for Success in Gender Mainstreaming', undertaken by the Centre for Regional, Economic and Social Research (CRESR) at Sheffield Hallam University, funded by the European Commission (see Yeandle et al., 1998). Case studies of mainstreaming practice in Finland, Spain and Austria were used to identify criteria for successful implementation of a mainstreaming strategy. The project revealed that case study participants were using different definitions of mainstreaming according to their particular experience and understanding of equal opportunities policy-making. This had a considerable impact on the practical actions which they adopted to implement the strategy. This discovery highlighted the need to revisit the conceptualization of mainstreaming, to clarify understanding of the concept which in turn could contribute to identifying the practical actions needed to enact it.

The article begins by exploring the periodization of the gender equality practice. It argues that practice has been compartmentalized into discrete rather than integral modes of delivery. These modes of delivery are underpinned by three different sets of understandings about equal opportunities. These are an equal treatment perspective, a women's perspective and most recently a gender perspective. The article challenges compartmentalism and suggests instead the use of the metaphor of the three-legged 'equality stool' to emphasize the perspectives' interdependency and hence the affinity between delivery approaches. It examines the European Commission's experience of equality policy-making to demonstrate how all three perspectives are part of its current understanding of gender equality and are embedded in its conceptualization of the gender mainstreaming strategy. The experiences of other multilateral agencies operating in the development field are a further source of examples. Like the European Commission they have attempted over time to embed

equality principles into their practice and as a result of this process, share a similar conceptualization of gender mainstreaming (Christian Michelsen Institute, 1999).

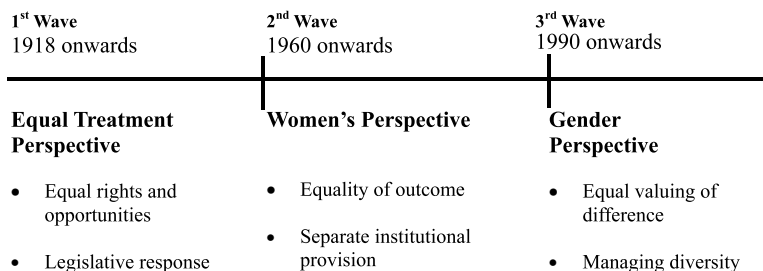
Lastly, the article argues that the current practice of mainstreaming is haphazard because it remains a 'fuzzy' concept. The concept of mainstreaming has become synonymous with the 'gender perspective' alone. It has also been defined as the goal of gender equality policies within organizations and used to describe a narrow set of tools for policy analysis, such as gender impact assessment (Meier, 1998) and gender proofing (ADM 1996).¹ The article argues that mainstreaming is a transformative strategy (Rees, 1998), which draws on the equal treatment perspective, the women's perspective and the gender perspective and their respective delivery approaches. The failure to articulate the complementarity of the three perspectives underpinning a mainstreaming strategy leads to misunderstanding and confusion and limits the strategy's ability to significantly reorder practice.

THE 'EQUALITY STOOL'

It is most usual to divide the political campaigns for gender equality into three distinct phases, which are historically specific and follow in progression (see Figure 1). This progression has been theorized in terms of first, second and, most recently, third wave feminism (Horrelli, 1998). First wave feminism describes the period of campaigning for women's suffrage at the turn of the century, which drew on the liberal principles of equal rights and treatment before the law. This was followed by a growing demand from the second wave feminists in the 1960s for positive action and separate women's provision. It concludes in the 1990s, with a shift to the gender perspective, which recognizes the diverse needs of women and men, as well as the need to broaden responsibility for equality work to all services and providers, hence involving men in the process of social change.

While some member states can describe the progression of their equality practice in this linear way, many cannot. Even for member states like the UK, France, Germany and the Nordic countries, which have experienced identifiable women's movements, these divisions do not capture the complexities of the struggle on the ground (Bennett et al., 1998). A holistic conceptualization of the different equality perspectives is needed in order to assist in explaining different member states' experiences. A holistic understanding which recognizes the interdependence of the perspectives would allow us to move away from a simplistic association of a mainstreaming strategy with the 'newest' perspective, the gender perspective.

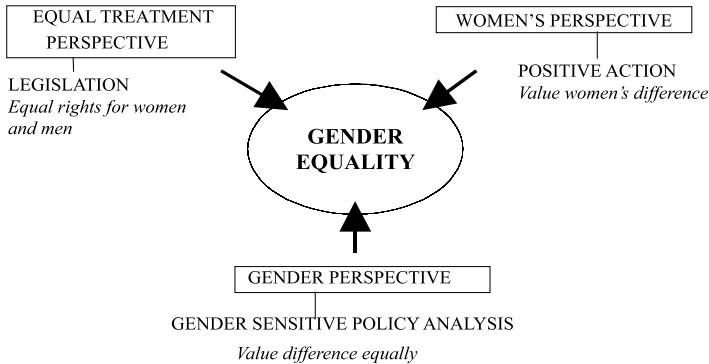
FIGURE 1
Northern European Equality Timeline



Using the metaphor of a 'three-legged equality stool' (Figure 2), it becomes possible to recognize that a mainstreaming strategy is dependent on three important supports, the equal treatment perspective, the women's perspective and the gender perspective (Bennett et al., 1998). The equal treatment perspective describes actions that guarantee women the same rights and the same opportunities as men in the public sphere. Its main way of delivery is through statutory and mandatory legal instruments. The women's perspective inspires initiatives that recognize women as a disadvantaged group in society, who deserve and require particular treatment and specialist provision in order to rectify their past experience of discrimination, which has become institutionalized. Lastly, the gender perspective promotes actions that aim to transform the organization of society to a fairer distribution of human responsibilities. It acknowledges the differences between women and between men. The transformation of human lives is premised on the understanding that men are not the deliberate oppressors of women, but can also be disempowered by current social arrangements. The gender perspective is delivered through new tools for gender-sensitive policy-making.

If any of the 'supports' of the stool are weak the potential for the achievement of equality is undermined. Each 'leg' of the stool represents one of the three perspectives. These perspectives all work together to achieve gender equality in all social arrangements, which is the necessary underpinning of a more egalitarian society. Using the metaphor of a three-legged stool gives us a way of visualizing the simultaneous interaction of one perspective with the others within the specific circumstances of different national contexts. The dynamic nature of historical development means that it is likely that one or more of the perspectives will be less developed than the others, at different times and in different spatial locations. For example, in Spain the equal treatment perspective was not given prominence in the Franco regime (Cousins, 1995). The development of an equality agenda in Spain has relied on the women's perspective

FIGURE 2
The 'Equality Stool'



being pushed by women's groups. Consequently, legislative statements of gender equality were not instituted until the 1990s (Cousins, 1995). By comparison, the UK equality agenda has a legislative base provided by the Sex Discrimination Act, 1976, but equally, a relatively weak women's perspective. This is due to the strong opposition to positive action measures for women's rights maintained by the Conservative government during the 1980s (Harriss, 1984). Arguably, the gender perspective is still developing in all of the EU member states, where the use of gender-sensitive policy-making tools and policies such as managing diversity are still in their infancy.

Continuing with the metaphor of a three-legged stool, it is possible to demonstrate that the equal treatment perspective, the women's perspective and the gender perspective are mutually supportive. Many women's initiatives depend on legal precedents, for example the use of quotas to give preference to women in elections to unrepresentative government structures. Likewise, a gender perspective may rely on the ability to use both legal and positive action techniques to act as catalysts for embedding gender awareness in organizational structures and procedures.

Gender mainstreaming has emerged as the new equality strategy. It can be positioned in the centre of the diagram as it reflects the culmination of contemporary conceptualization and practical experience of strategies to advance gender equality. Its successful implementation is premised on use of an equal treatment perspective, a women's perspective and a gender perspective, applied as the context demands. Consequently, a mainstreaming strategy undertaken by each member state will ideally address the peculiarities of its own equality history including the legislative base, the strength of support for a women's perspective and its 'gender contract' (Duncan, 1994).

APPLICATION OF METAPHOR OF THE THREE-LEGGED STOOL TO THE HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF EU EQUALITY POLICY

This section of the article examines the archaeology of gender equality within EU policy development and applies the metaphor of the three-legged stool to locate the different equality perspectives within it. The origin of equal opportunities policy in the EU is to be found in Article 119 of the founding Treaty of Rome 1957 (Hoskyns, 1992). This starting point represented an equal treatment perspective to equality, which guaranteed women the same rights in law and the same opportunities in the public sphere, as were available to men. Article 119 did not arise from a campaign for women's rights; it arose from French concerns for fair market competition² and commits member states to the principle of equal pay for equal work. However, the commitment was only fully enacted in the 1970s through the rulings of the European Court of Justice to plaintive cases raised by individual women. As a result of these cases, and in the context of growing demands from the feminist movements across member states, the principle embodied in Article 119 was elaborated in three key directives.³ Subsequently, the EC has put in place a complex set of legal provisions aimed at giving women equal access to employment, vocational training, working conditions and, to a lesser extent, social protection. Some of these provisions bind member states to implement national legislation such as the directive on the protection of pregnant women at work (92/85/EEC October 1992). Other provisions such as the Council recommendation on childcare (92/241/EEC March 1992) only have the scope to guide policy-makers.

The equal treatment perspective is represented by the EU's legislative framework. This perspective has grown from being a limited doctrine of abstract individual rights, solely concerned with economic objectives, into a complex set of legal instruments in which there are precedents for recognizing the rights of collective groups, enabling a variety of social policy instruments to be developed. EU legislation has realized a certain degree of convergence of nation-states' legislation. In contrast to many national legislative frameworks, EU legislation is more advanced in conceptualizing women's rights. Its impact has been most important in newly democratized states such as Greece, Spain and Portugal, which had no previous experience of equality laws or even equal opportunities policies (Rossilli, 1997). In the cases where a country's national legislation surpasses that of the EU, there is an argument for member governments to lobby for the EU framework to be changed to avoid a process of levelling down to the lowest common equality denominator.

The development of a pseudo-legal framework of directives and recommendations to protect and enhance women's working lives was

encouraged by the impetus of the social democratic states under the Delors presidency of the European Commission (1989–95). Delors reorientated the Union's purpose to address the social aspects of workers' labour market participation. In doing so he was also influenced by vocal demands coming from women's movements across Europe (Hoskyns, 1992). A strong women's lobby, which includes influential MEPS, the European Parliament Committee on Women's Rights, the European Women's Lobby and grassroots women's organizations, has been a vital driver for institutional provision for gender equality (Hoskyns, 1992). This lobby expresses the women's perspective, which values and acts to support women's difference. Unlike the equal treatment perspective it views women as a disadvantaged group, who deserve particular treatment to rectify past historical and structural oppression. The women's perspective is reflected in the EU's institutional structure and in particular the programmes it funds. Institutionally, the Committee on Women's Rights in the European Parliament and the European Commission Equal Opportunities Unit in the Directorate for Employment, Industrial Relations and Social Affairs work to ensure that information about women's particular needs is taken into consideration in the policy-making process. These structures are also involved in devising policy, securing budget lines and carrying out monitoring to support a raft of positive action projects. The main vehicle for these projects has been the Third, Fourth and Fifth Community Action Programmes for Equal Opportunities for Women and Men, and programmes such as NOW (New Opportunities for Women) in the Structural Funds which ring-fenced funding to support training opportunities for women.

Although advances in the EU equal opportunities agenda have occurred as a result of the women's perspective, this input has never been fully recognized. For example, the Equal Opportunities Group of Commissioners, headed by former President Jacques Santer, was launched in 1996 as a flagship for the future direction of the Union's equality policy. However, as MEP Pauline Green spelt out at a Mainstreaming Equality Seminar in London 1998, this group only came about due to the spirited battle of women's commissioners and pressure from the European Parliament. The Parliament expressed its 'gross dissatisfaction' with the Commission's approach to equality. It made a difference that the parliamentary chamber was, at that time, made up of 60 percent women MEPS (Green, 1998).

The gender perspective is the newest and most recent approach to gender equality on the EU political agenda. It arose out of a 'policy jungle' of equality measures and initiatives, which appeared to be losing momentum and failing to bring change to women's lives. The inadequacy of existing policies was attributed to a lack of coherence, a fact that was first formally acknowledged by the Third Community Action Programme

for Equal Opportunities (1991–5). Importantly, the programme referred to the society-wide benefits that equality measures could bring (COM (96) 650 final), returning to the liberal idea that both men and women had something to gain. It was in this context that mainstreaming gender equality was introduced alongside the emerging gender perspective.

The gender perspective has drawn support from proponents of both the equal treatment perspective and the women's perspective, although it is not only a combination of their views, but instead represents a reconceptualization of gender equality. Its focus on gender, rather than on women, fully acknowledges for the first time in the Union's history, the relevance of men's lives to the equality debate. The gender perspective recognizes that adapting the organization of society to a fairer distribution of human responsibilities must aim to transform men's roles, as well as those of women (COM (96) 67 final). In shifting the focus from women to gender, the perspective addresses the feelings of resentment and alienation caused by the use of positive action approaches. These approaches, which targeted funding and reserved opportunities for women, often placed women in opposition to men and sometimes in opposition to other women (Coyle, 1989).

Lastly, the gender perspective moves away from the model of women as a homogeneous group by recognizing women's diversity and difference, which relate to factors such as life course, class, age, ethnicity, religion and disability. Consequently, the gender perspective suggests the use of methods from both the other perspectives, to achieve a balance between the individualization of the equal treatment perspective and the one-sided focus of the women's perspective. The development of a perspective which aims to be inclusive has arisen in the context of Union enlargement. Greater political and economic union has brought a new emphasis to EU policy-making on the need to respond to the diverse need of a growing European constituency and to ensure economic prosperity by harnessing the contribution and talents of all citizens in the European workplace.

MAINSTREAMING GENDER EQUALITY

Gender mainstreaming as a strategy first appeared after the UN Third World Conference on Women in Nairobi, in 1985 (Council of Europe, 1998). This was seen as a necessary action to ensure full integration of women's values into development work. Subsequently, the European Commission made a decisive contribution to the preparations of the UN Conference on Women in Beijing in September 1995, which guaranteed that mainstreaming equality was included in the 'Platform for Action', to which national states have pledged their support.

Mainstreaming had been first formally acknowledged in the European Commission Third Community Action Programme for Equal Opportunities (1991–5), which recognized that existing policies were failing to have any impact on the majority of women's lives and lacked coherence. Subsequently, the Fourth Community Action Programme for Equal Opportunities for Women and Men (1996–2000) headlined and explained the principle of mainstreaming equality. It proposed that 'methods aimed at integrating an equal opportunities dimension into all policies and activities' should be developed and promoted by member states. The aim was to bring a gender perspective into all EU policy-making in a 'coherent and systematic way' (COM (96) 650 final, 1997: 12). The group of specialists of the Council of Europe informed the debate through their work, which identified three key aspects of mainstreaming: integration of a gender perspective, a political process of ownership and a set of techniques or tools. The Council of Europe report defined mainstreaming as follows:

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 all stages, by the actors normally involved in policy making. (Council of Europe, 1998)

The Fourth Community Action Programme was followed by the Communication on Incorporating Equal Opportunities for Women and Men into all Community Policies and Activities. The Communication reiterated the need for member states to mobilize all general policies and measures for the purpose of achieving equality (COM (1998) 122 final). This mobilization was presented as part of a mainstreaming strategy consisting of seven areas (COM (96) 67 final, 1996:124). These areas can be summarized as the need to secure resources, voice and vision.

- *Resources*: secure more funding for equality projects and redistribute resources to address disadvantage (women's perspective);
- *Voice*: address the democratic deficit and secure a gender balance in decision-making (equal treatment perspective);
- *Vision*: secure the reconciliation of home, work and family life (gender perspective).

This article argues that these objectives for the mainstreaming strategy draw on the three equality perspectives already described. The targeting of named resources accords with the women's perspective, which requires positive interventions to rectify women's disadvantaged situations and status. An objective which aims to improve the gender balance in decision-making attempts to uphold and extend people's rights to equal treatment in policy directives and legislation. Vision encapsulates a

gender perspective which imagines a more equal distribution of human responsibilities between women and men.

Neither the Fourth Community Action Programme nor the Communication on Mainstreaming explicitly recognizes the interdependence of all three equality perspectives which are embedded in the EU's mainstreaming strategy. However, in the Communication's discussion of the methods required to implement a mainstreaming strategy it does distinguish between different delivery approaches which this article has associated with the women's perspective and the gender perspective. It advocates the use of methods for gendered policy-making (everybody's action) and tools for positive action (specialist action). In 1997, the European Commission issued a Strategy Paper on the Mainstreaming Communication based on its own experience of implementing a mainstreaming strategy in its internal processes (EQOP 02-97rev DG V/D/5 January 1997). This article reinforces the need for a combination of methods to be used. It stresses that the combination of methods is highly interdependent on the receptivity of a particular context to gender equality:

A dual and complimentary [*sic*] approach is needed: On one side, the systematic application of gender impact analysis and its continuous monitoring and evaluation in all Community policies and activities. On the other side, the continuation, and when feasible, strengthening of the specific positive measures which are currently being applied. (EQOP 02-97rev DG V/D/5 January 1997: Section 1)

MISCONCEPTIONS ABOUT THE MAINSTREAMING STRATEGY

The Fourth Community Action Programme, the Communication on Mainstreaming and the European Commission's Strategy Paper are the key documents which describe the EU's conceptualization of a mainstreaming strategy. However, as the CRESR research study highlighted, the lack of acknowledgement of the interdependence of the equality perspectives, which are incorporated into the mainstreaming strategy, has resulted in misconception and confused practice. This lack of clarity may have arisen because of the way in which mainstreaming came to be formulated. Previous European strategies to advance equality have been adopted by policy-makers as a result of pressure from social movements, such as the women's liberation movement. In contrast, a mainstreaming strategy for delivering gender equality has been envisioned and articulated by a small number of key actors in the European Commission. It is a strategy that has been devised to address the *perceived* needs of women and to pre-empt gender discrimination in *future* labour markets of European member states. It represents an advance action to create a

certain form of social arrangement. Hence it is a transformative proposition rather than a reaction to established discrimination which has been thoroughly theorized.

Confusion about what gender mainstreaming aims to achieve and the practical actions it involves has focused on two issues. The first is mainstreaming's relationship to existing strategies for positive action (women's perspective). The second is the debate about mainstreaming's ultimate objectives and whether it is a strategy or a delivery approach consisting of new tools and methods.

The EU mainstreaming strategy has been selective in its use of feminist theory. It has focused on organizational culture (including language) as a major barrier to change people's attitudes and behaviour. While it recognizes the concept of gendered processes on structural, interpersonal and symbolic levels it does not locate these in an analysis of patriarchy. The gender perspective, which provided the context for the development of mainstreaming, implicitly relies on a liberal conception of social arrangements, which attributes inequality to institutional habit and current economic requirements. It criticizes these arrangements for limiting and damaging the choices of the majority of men as it limits those of women. The rejection of the idea of women as the oppressed group has made defining a strategy for action extremely difficult. The complexity of human interaction and oppression, which the gender perspective acknowledges, means that mainstreaming can appear to be a diluted version of positive action strategies and may appear irrelevant to women's lives. Consequently, feminist scholars and practitioners have been critical of a mainstreaming strategy and have been slow to make a contribution to the policy debate (Bennett, 2000).

The research project undertaken by CRESR also identified some confusion in the description of mainstreaming, referring to it sometimes as a strategy and sometimes as a method or set of tools (Yeandle et al., 1998). In the communications from the European Commission, mainstreaming equality is described as a strategy which should aim to integrate equal opportunities into all Commission activities and policies. However, mainstreaming is not a goal in its own right, but a necessary mechanism for achieving gender equality through the objectives of other agendas. It is conceived as a horizontal policy thread running through all arenas. To confuse the issue, mainstreaming is also described as a method, or set of tools, used to monitor and appraise the impact of policy in terms of equal opportunities. Policy analysts use the terms 'strategy' and 'method' interchangeably, which inevitably leads to confusion at both the levels of policy formulation and implementation. The strategy of mainstreaming gender equality has been solely formulated within the specific economic policy context of the EU. Commentators have argued that the EU's equality policy has always been held hostage within this framework⁴ (Hoskyns,

1992; Duncan, 1996; Rossilli, 1997). The emphasis on the mechanics of the policy-making process which has dominated discussion of mainstreaming may be attributed to the preoccupations of this wider context. Most policy discussions focus on the practical difficulties of implementing mainstreaming in the context of closer integration of member states. For example, language has been identified as a barrier to effective implementation since in some languages the words for 'gender' or 'mainstreaming' do not exist (European Commission, 1998).

Within the discourse on mainstreaming, it is important to recognize that it can be used to describe both a strategy to achieve equality as well as a set of methods and specific tools to implement the strategy. If mainstreaming is to effect transformational change, it will simultaneously provide both the strategy and methods for achieving equality. To date, the research project has found that while articulation of a coherent mainstreaming strategy has been slow to develop in member states, there has been considerable progress on developing methods and tools (Yeandle et al., 1998). The lack of understanding of the revolution proposed has meant that mainstreaming gender equality has been interpreted as merely a new set of methods rather than a 'transformative' strategy (Rees, 1996). Taken as a set of methods, gender mainstreaming has been interpreted as the latest management equality tool, an improvement on the positive action strategies of the early 1980s, which provoked unhelpful resistance. This idea that it is a replacement strategy has arisen because it appears to be the opposite of specialist positive action provision. Mainstreaming aims to transfer responsibility for equality action away from women specialists to the mainstream brief. Interpreted as a strategy, as the European Commission intends, the contradiction disappears. To bring gender awareness into the consciousness and daily routine of each employee, policy-maker and manager will require gender-targeted training, specialist equality appointments and social support mechanisms, recognizable as positive action techniques. A mainstreaming strategy is intended to be a dual and complementary strategy to equal treatment and women's perspective strategies already in operation. The problem becomes one of a failure to theorize and articulate this complementarity clearly. As policy-makers have only partially understood the intention there is commonly a confusion of terms. Commentators use gender perspective interchangeably with a women's perspective (Bennett et al., 1998).

CONCLUSIONS

Gender mainstreaming is a strategy addressing a future, which is not yet upon us. It is only beginning to demonstrate and convince people and

policy-makers of its argument that reordering women and men's everyday lives will lead to greater equality and equality of opportunity. There is currently very little literature describing the process of European initiatives to mainstream gender equality. There are not enough successful, long-standing examples of state-level practice to contrast and hence identify lessons for practice.

To fill this vacuum the European Commission, through the Fourth Community Action Programme for Equal Opportunities for Women and Men (1996–2000), has commissioned research to analyse current practical examples of gender mainstreaming in order to make both the understanding of the strategy and the description of the process of implementation more robust. Further, the Treaty of Amsterdam (1998) substantially strengthened the legal basis for gender equality. Articles 2 and 3 of this treaty formalized the commitment to gender mainstreaming. The articles identified gender equality as a specific task and as an objective across all areas of community activities. Since the Communication on Incorporating Equal Opportunities for Men and Women into All Community Policies and Activities there has been some progress, particularly in fields such as human rights, employment policy, structural funds, education, training and staff and information policies (COM (1998) 122 final). Nevertheless, in the words of the Commission there remain barriers and shortcomings, which include, lack of awareness in decision-making, lack of finance and resources and lack of expertise in this field.

In summary, there remains confusion and misunderstanding surrounding the EU's mainstreaming policy. Arguably, this has resulted from a lack of conceptualization of mainstreaming. This has not been helped by a lack of academic and practitioner contributions to the debate. While the EU has played a pivotal role in the promotion of mainstreaming in member states, the specific cultural context of the European Commission with its economic focus, has constrained the policy development of mainstreaming.

The transformation of organizational cultures lies at the very heart of mainstreaming. They will undoubtedly remain a powerful barrier to change. Furthermore, the translation of mainstreaming gender equality across the EU will obviously depend on each member state's gender contract (Duncan, 1994). This poses the problem of states implementing a gender mainstreaming strategy at different rates. However, one of the strengths of gender mainstreaming, may lie in its ability to appeal to politicians at either end of the political spectrum as it holds recognizable opportunities for many sectional interests. Mainstreaming essentially offers a pluralistic approach that values the diversity among both women and men.

NOTES

1. For further examples of mainstreaming tools refer to the report on 'Gender Mainstreaming: Conceptual Framework, Methodology and Presentation of Good Practice', Council of Europe, 1998. This report was prepared by the Council of Europe's Group of Specialists on Mainstreaming.
2. The French government was concerned that differential rates of pay paid to women in the textile industry in other member states represented an unfair competitive advantage. Its objective in arguing for Article 119 was to mitigate this effect (Rossilli, 1997: 64).
3. Directives on equal treatment as regards employment and working conditions (1976), equal treatment in matters of social security (1978) and equal pay for men and women (1975).
4. The precedent for equality principles to be built into the fabric of the EU as a legal entity, without a social justice purpose, was established by the inclusion of Article 119 in the founding Treaty of Rome, 1957.

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