

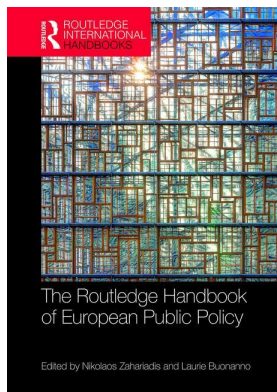
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10

GENDER POLICY

Sophie Jacquot

Introduction

The literature that addresses interactions between gender and European Union (EU) shares some of the main features which characterize European studies. These works have been marked in the 1990s by an institutionalist bias and have more recently witnessed a development of sociological approaches.

One of the peculiarities of this literature appears to be its late flourishing. Even though the first development of public action to address the problem of gender inequalities in the workplace at the European level can be traced back to the mid-1970s, the construction of this specific field of research on “gender and EU policies” took place relatively recently. Since the mid-1990s, some seminal works appeared, like those of Catherine Hoskyns (1996), Sonia Mazey (1995, 1998) or Ilona Ostner and Jane Lewis (1998 [1995]).

Linked to social policy, actions promoting equality between women and men in the labor market were institutionalized some three decades ago at the European level. This policy constitutes, both from a legislative and a distributive point of view, “the central and the most deeply drawn pillar of the fragile social policy of the European Community” (Barnard, 2001, p. 219). In the 1990s, the main objective of the first generation of authors was to understand the enigma of the unexpected development of this policy, whose unique foundation was – and remained until 1997 – Article 119 of the treaty of Rome on equal pay for female and male workers. It is at this same period that some “big name” male academics among EU studies and political science took an interest in this strange case. This was, for example, the case with the notion of the European Community as a regulatory State for Giandomenico Majone (1996), with European integration as a path-dependent process for Paul Pierson’s historical neo-institutionalism (1996), or with the neofunctionalist institutionalization of Europe for James Caporaso (Caporaso & Jupille, 2001; Stone Sweet & Caporaso, 1998). As a matter of fact, until recently, these “malestream” representatives have hardly been the only ones to consider the contribution of the gender equality policy to the study of the European integration process, governance and political system.

The interweaving of the policy and academic communities

The term “velvet triangle” was forged by Alison Woodward (2004) to describe the advocacy coalition that was formed since the 1970s around the EU gender equality policy. The term

merges the concepts of “iron triangle” (used in the literature on interest groups to designate policy subsystems with identified stakeholders whose participation is stable over time), and of “velvet ghetto” (used to describe the horizontal segregation of women in business). The concept aims to underline the formal and informal links which gather different types of actors in favor of the development of this policy: feminists working in national and European bureaucracies – sometimes called “femocrats” – women politicians, members of NGOs and gender studies scholars.

The “velvet triangle” is a very useful analytical tool to understand the functioning of the gender equality policy domain at the European level, particularly during its “golden age” of the 1980s and 1990s. As highlighted by Alison Woodward herself (2012), the expansion of this literature and that of its main object went hand in hand. If the EU as a political system is a fertile ground for a gender-based research approach, it has also played a crucial role in structuring and developing this research field. Since the 1980s, in order to develop a transnational base of support and to enrich its legislative proposals, the European Commission set up networks of experts on gender issues (transposition and implementation of the directives on gender equality, equal opportunities in education and decision-making, childcare, positive actions in large companies, etc.). Then the Commission funded large research programs on gender issues. Thus, funds have been allocated, comparable European-wide data have been collected and disseminated and links have been forged between the different points of the “velvet triangle” based, most often, on a common political commitment for women rights. The socialization at work in these fora has contributed to an early Europeanization of research on gender equality at the domestic and European levels.

Analyzing (and evaluating) the European Union gender regime

As mentioned above, the main objective of the first works on European gender equality policy is to untangle the puzzle of the unexpected emergence and development of this policy. This has led many authors to question the definition of the EU gender regime (Walby, 2004). The aim is to try to make sense of the interactions between the EU public action, the legal texts, economic instruments, dominant representations, social practices and institutions with regard to gender equality, and to see how these different elements contribute to create and reinforce a specific configuration of gender relations at the EU level. This perspective highlights three key dimensions of the relationship between gender and European Union.

First, an important part of the literature analyzes the formation of the EU gender regime in three steps (equality of rights, difference, gender) and conceptualizes the different political strategies for gender equality (equality through the law, positive actions, gender mainstreaming) and their relationships (Booth & Bennett, 2002; Rees, 1998). Through the notions of equal treatment, equal opportunities and equal impact, these works unveil the transformation and expansion of the principle of equality which is at the heart of the EU gender regime. The passage from equal rights to difference and then to the notion of gender permits scrutiny of the evolution of the EU gender equality policy instruments, including the mobilization of legal, budgetary, cross-cutting and cognitive instruments (Jacquot, 2015).

Second, another important part of the literature looks at the role of some actors in the formation and evolution of the gender regime. The European Commission, a “purposeful opportunist” (Cram, 1993) when it comes to gender policy, has certainly received the most attention (e.g., Ellina, 2003; Mazey, 1995). But, the analysis of the contribution of other institutional actors, such as the European Court of Justice (Cichowski, 2007; Kenney, 2002; Shaw, 2001), the European Parliament (Liebert, 1999; Vallance & Davies, 1986) or the European

Council (van der Vleuten, 2007), is also useful in analyzing the complex governance of this policy domain. Furthermore, the identification of the role of private actors, especially women and feminist movements and their ability to build coalitions that cross the boundaries between institutions and social movements, is one of the literature's great contributions (Hoskyns, 1996; Mazey, 1998). By focusing on these actors, their evolution over time and thus showing the periods of growth and decline of gender equality policy, these works question the apparent linear progression inspired by neofunctionalism and historical institutionalism (Egan, 1998). The emergence, evolution and the different paths of EU gender equality policy have not been self-evident.

Third, another strand of the literature analyzes the EU gender regime from a feminist angle (Galligan & Claverro, 2009). The central criticism raised by these works concerns the economic prism from which gender equality is being considered. Gender equality is transformed into a mere instrument of economic growth and competitiveness; employability and the conciliation between private and professional life become the alpha and omega of a public policy which only aims at increasing women's participation in the labor market (Annesley, 2007; Jenson, 2008; Lewis, 2006; Young, 2000). However, more recently literature underlines the complexity of the EU gender regime. It is becoming increasingly difficult to rely on a single model of analysis. One example of this multiplicity is that of violence against women. European institutions simultaneously consider it as an issue related to human trafficking, as a private sphere question linked to male domination and as a public health problem (Kantola, 2010, pp. 148–167).

More generally, analysis of the EU gender regime points to internal contradictions of a political system based on the primacy of the market and a neoliberal project that participates in increasing gender inequalities but which in parallel recognizes equality between men and women (Articles 2 and 3 of the Treaty of the European Union) as a major value to be promoted and defended (Jacquot, 2015; Kantola & Squires, 2012).

Gender and Europeanization

Having analyzed the EU gender equality policy, the first generation of authors became interested in the translation, implementation and the domestic impact of this policy in a multilevel system.

In a 1995 text, Ilona Ostner and Jane Lewis emphasize what they call the “paid employment nexus,” that is to say the series of factors which, at the European level, combine to limit gender equality policy to the sphere of equality in the workplace and the labor market. They also insist the policy must pass through a “needle's eye” to have an impact on gender relations at the national level: inclusion on the EU agenda and national gender regimes. Similarly, Sonia Mazey stresses the role of national filters in the implementation of gender equality policies. She highlights what she calls the “policy hinterland,” a dense network of national policies, institutions and programs that reduce the capacity of penetration of supranational norms, which are generally more progressive and more beneficial to women than those of the country (Mazey, 1998). These works have shown how the impact of the European gender equality policy is dependent on the nature of national gender regimes (for a refinement of the model, see Liebert, 2003).

EU gender equality policy analyzed the “Europeanization” of national policies even before the term made its appearance in the early 2000s. James Caporaso and Joseph Jupille (2001) compare the transposition of European directives on equal pay for men and women in the UK and France. Applying the “misfit” model, they show that the adaptive pressures were strongest and the changes most significant in the UK where the gap with European standards was more pronounced, while France, yet closer to European recommendations,

showed more resistance. Comparing the two countries also allowed them to highlight the central role of mediating institutions, such as the Equal Opportunities Commission in the UK, which facilitated the transmission of European norms and contributed to domestic structural change.

Since the early 2000s, a second wave of work on gender and Europeanization of public policies has emerged. It focuses on analyzing EU enlargement to the countries of Eastern Europe and Central Europe in 2004 and 2007. The accession process reveals *in situ* the confrontation between European standards of gender equality and very different gender regimes. As highlighted by Abels and Mushaben (2012, p. 13), these studies show how the Europeanization of gender equality policies in these countries have been harshly hit by the economic crisis and austerity policies (Avdeyeva, 2006; Duman & Horvath, 2011; Galligan et al., 2007; Krizsan & Popa, 2012; Roth, 2008).

The second wave of the literature also pays greater attention to the role of actors, strategies and leeway in the process of Europeanization (Lombardo & Forest, 2012). It has been shown, for example, how in the field of reconciling work and private life, French feminist actors have been put aside in the national debate because, unlike family groups, they are less able to use the resources provided by the EU in this area and to frame their claims within norms promoted at European level (Jacquot et al., 2011).

New areas, new approaches, new methods: a legitimate field?

Since the early 2000s, an increasing number of works has developed in order to analyze the implementation of gender mainstreaming and the integration of a gender perspective into new areas of public policy. Besides the traditional domains of labor market, welfare state and social policy in general (Beveridge & Velluti, 2008; Guerrina, 2005; Hantrais, 2000, 2007; Lewis, 2006), case studies as diverse as the circulation of norms on sexual harassment (Zippel, 2006) and human trafficking (Askola, 2007; Locher, 2007), gender and EU partnership agreements or the EU neighborhood policy (Petö & Manners, 2006), gender and peacekeeping (Eulriet, 2009; Kronsell, 2012a) or the EU aid policy from a gender perspective (Elgström, 2000; Lister, 2006) have recently multiplied. There has also been a rise of the research on gender and representation, participation and political behavior at the European level (Kantola, 2009). The reconfigurations of citizenship (Einhorn, 2010), the impact of multiculturalism (Halsaa et al., 2012), intersectionality (Krizsan et al., 2012; Lombardo & Verloo, 2009), and the interactions between sexuality and politics (Elman, 2007) are also questioned at the EU level in a very stimulating way.

Following Elisabeth Prügl, it is possible to argue that not only has the policy field expanded and diversified but also the research questions have changed significantly. The aim is now less and less to ask how and why the EU develops and implements gender policies, but rather how and why gender difference is constructed and gender inequalities reproduced through these policies (Prügl, 2007, p. 434).

Beyond the diversity of themes and research questions, it is important to note the diversification of analytical approaches used to explore them. If the work of the first generation of EU gender equality scholars was mainly inspired by neo-institutionalism and the theory of social movements, a desire to stand out from these perspectives and to develop more sociological (Graziano et al., 2011) and discursive (Lombardo et al., 2009) approaches has surfaced in recent years.

Moreover, even after considering the theoretical contribution of feminist works on the EU (Kronsell, 2012b), more and more authors directly engage with the “big” EU theories with a

view to include gender in the picture. The best example of this attempt is probably to be found in Anna van der Vleuten's book *The Price of Gender Equality*, where she applies and discusses an intergovernmentalist analytical framework in order to study the development of EU gender equality policy, showing the weight of economic and cognitive factors in the process of Member State preference formation (van der Vleuten, 2007).

Finally, one must highlight the recent emergence of diverse methodologies in this field. Even though qualitative approaches remain overrepresented, studies using gendered indicators and employing discourse analysis or budgetary analysis have begun to take center stage. In general, the programs of the "European Conferences on Politics and Gender," organized every two years by the European Consortium for Political Research Standing group on gender and politics (www.ecpg.eu/), provide in their section on the EU a fairly accurate picture of the thematic, analytical, theoretical and methodological richness of this research field.

Despite all these changes, have the works on EU gender equality policy received their rightful recognition within contemporary EU studies? Here it is possible to follow Ian Manners's views on feminist perspectives of European integration and to extend them to the literature on gender and the EU in general. According to him, among all the critical approaches of European integration, they "are the strongest in terms of participants and contribution, but the most discriminated against in terms of exclusion from tradition EU political science" (2007, p. 87). This is where we find again the "velvet triangle" and the paradox that accompanies it: its cohesion is its main strength, but the maturity of this subfield has not been able to completely overcome its imposed isolation.

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