Gender mainstreaming as feminist politics
A critical analysis of the pursuit of gender equality in Swedish local government

av

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Abstract


Gender mainstreaming is often described as a strategy to increase gender equality in states and other institutions and/or to make them more gender aware. It should however be considered a contested concept, and the aim of this thesis is to produce a critical perspective and empirical knowledge about whether, and if so how, gender mainstreaming contributes to a more (gender) equal society. The production of gender mainstreaming as gender equality policy is investigated, using both feminist new institutionalism and discourse theory.

The study investigates whether, and if so how, gender mainstreaming is facilitating new public management by transforming the ambitions of feminist politics into a neoliberal strategy adapted for public administration.

The case examined in this study is a local government gender mainstreaming project conducted in a municipality in Sweden. The case also includes vertical and horizontal outlooks and is categorized as a critical case. To study “what is not there” in the empirical material, the concepts of silences and silencing are used as both theoretical and methodological tools.

The thesis shows that gender mainstreaming produces a gender equality policy that is disconnected from political parties, and that gender mainstreaming becomes a common good. This, I argue, produces a non-political politics, which includes a governing technique that privileges political consensus, articulated in terms of non-conflict and win-win.

The thesis identifies a conflation between gender mainstreaming, as a strategy, with the policy objective of gender equality. Gender mainstreaming did not create space for addressing gender-based violence, or include the voice of the women’s movement, from which it can be concluded that gender mainstreaming does not contribute to feminist politics. This could have societal consequences and can influence, or even hinder, actual political change.

Keywords: Gender mainstreaming, gender equality, feminist politics, public administration, feminist political theory, local government, discourse, feminist new institutionalism

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