
How to mainstream “gender” into the “gender-neutral” Rural Development Policy? – Difficulties and prospects from an evaluators view

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Abstract

When talking about policies referring to a spatial dimension, this usually denotes regional policy, regional planning policy and sector-specific policies closely linked to these – e.g. industrial policy, infrastructure policy and structural policy. This view often neglects the fact that all policy areas are principally characterised by some sort of relation with space. As a result, sector policy measures frequently have considerable effects – often “unexpected side products” on spatial relations. Due to the different complex life situations of women and men – the varying degrees of involvement in gainful employment and care-giving work, divergent access to mobility, differing incomes, different skills, etc. – political measures and instruments impact on women and men in different ways. However, the implementation of gender-sensitive measures and instruments is not yet regarded as a priority problem by the mostly male actors in many relevant areas of sector policies.

Rural development policy should become more aware of the gender images underlying its programmes and measures. In particular, women are to be identified as a potential for rural and regional development and as capable actors in the policy process. There is also a lack of detailed data at the regional level as well as of financial resources and time on the part of gender policy experts to enable them to clarify the gender-based relevance of planned interventions and to assess the effects of individual measures on the status of equality between women and men.

This paper will discuss the difficulties to implement the requirement of the application of the EU-wide concept of “gender mainstreaming” in respect to the “Rural Development Programme for Austria” (RDP). Experiences and results from the study “Fundamental principles of ‘Gender-sensitive Regional Development’” commissioned by the Federal Chancellery, Department of Regional Policy, and from the Evaluation on the cross-cutting theme “Equal Opportunities between women and men” of the RDP are the basis for this paper. They show that most stakeholders in the various administrative and spatial levels dealing with RDP do have difficulties in understanding and implementing “gender mainstreaming” in their field of activity.

Keywords: gender equality, gender mainstreaming, regional policy, rural development, rural women

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1 Why is it important to integrate gender equality in rural policy?

The regional/rural policy was obviously up-graded with the Austrian accession to the European Union in 1995. The increased volume of subsidies for rural development and the focus on regional programmes brought not only a turning point in the practise of subsidising the regional/rural development. At the same time a dynamic discourse on gender equality issues started in these fields of policy. Since the Treaty of Amsterdam 1997 gender equality is a central commitment of the European Union². It is a main cross cutting objective which has to be considered in all political and administrative activities of the European Union.

Beyond this up-grading of rural policy in politics, economy and public opinion a professionalisation and a higher quality of regional policy due to the framework of EU-programme planning can be observed (Steiner 2002, 757f). In addition to encouraging experiences the promotion and the implementation of equality between women and men in the EU-structural fund programmes – in the sense of gender mainstreaming³ – have become a great challenge and an important commitment for the Austrian regional/rural policy. Regional actors are explicitly requested to contribute within their work to equality between women and men. To integrate questions of equality between women and men requires a focus on women and men – their needs, abilities, potentials, their relation to each other, but also the discriminations they experience belonging to a gender-group (Oedl-Wieser 2002).

In Austria gender equality is discussed primarily as social issue and not as an economical issue (Aufhauser et. al. 2003, Taylor et al. 2001). The actors of regional/rural policy have difficulties to see the importance of gender issues for their own field of work and there is still great scepticism regarding the possibility and necessity to link gender policy with a form of regional/rural policy primarily interested in initiating and safeguarding socio-economic processes of innovation at the regional level.

But the inequality between women and men in our society causes substantial costs with implications to regional development processes. Through the European wide strategy of gender mainstreaming, the gender issue can be embedded in a wider frame and can become more practical relevance. Many fields of policies, which are influencing and shaping regional/rural development e.g. agrarian policy, environmental policy, infrastructural policy or social policy have not only a significant impact on the space but also have effects on the gender relations in the regions. These effects are hardly recognised until now. In regional programmes and measures the concepts about the involvement and participation of women and men are in most cases not compatible with the real living conditions and multiple ways of living. Therefore it is very important to make the big variety of lives of women and men and their potentials in different regional contexts visible (Aufhauser et. al. 2003). Furthermore it is necessary to make concrete points of attachment for the gender policy implementation in regional/rural development.

The regional/rural policies are seen commonly as “gender-neutral” in their effects and it is assumed, that both, men and women, can benefit from these effects (Meseke 2002). Because of the mostly different living conditions of men and women – differences in the participation in the working sphere, household and caring work, mobility, income, qualification – political measures and instruments have different effects on men and women. This circum-

² Article F, Article 2, Article 3, Article 13, Article 137 and Article 141 of the Treaty of Amsterdam signed 2 October 1997 (Oedl-Wieser 2000, 131ff)

³ Definition of the European Commission (1996): "The systematic consideration of the differences between the conditions, situations and needs of women and men in all Community policies and actions: this is the basic feature of the principle of 'mainstreaming', which the Commission has adopted. This does not mean simply making Community programmes or resources more accessible to women, but rather the simultaneous mobilisation of legal instruments, financial resources and the Community's analytical and organisational capacities in order to introduce in all areas the desire to build balanced relationships between women and men. In this respect it is necessary and important to base the policy of equality between women and men on a sound statistical analysis of the situation of women and men in the various areas of life and the changes taking place in societies."

stance can lead to less relevance and efficiency of interventions in regional/rural policy (Fries 2000).

Austria has also entered in an engagement in gender mainstreaming on national level and on Länder level⁴. In many departments of administrations gender mainstreaming has become a main objective and is embedded in the legislation. Because of the commitment for implementing gender mainstreaming the pressure to check regional and rural programmes, measures and the expenditures in respect to gender equality will increase.

2 How to explain gender equality and gender mainstreaming?

The requirements on gender mainstreaming laid down by the European Commission constitute an enormously important incentive for the coverage of equality issues in the framework both of regional/rural development and of the policy areas influencing it. These requirements – which focus on equality in the sense of equal opportunities – are currently decisive for action in Austria (Aufhauser et al. 2003, 5). The clash of different notions of “gender” and “equality” amongst the different actors in this policy area causes irritations to which so far has not been given sufficient attention in the context of the discussions on gender mainstreaming and equal opportunities. The implementation of gender mainstreaming processes in policy is currently strongly influenced by the learning processes that have already taken place through the inclusion of gender mainstreaming in the fields of labour-market and employment policies. Corresponding learning processes to likewise integrate an equality perspective in regional/rural economic policies, technology and innovation policies, but also in agricultural policies, have only just begun.

The discussion of the issue of equality between women and men is characterised by terms and concepts that are understood and interpreted very differently by different persons. Since female and male actors from a wide variety of institutional and social contexts meet and interact in the field of regional policy, it is particularly important to ensure mutual understanding and communication concerning equality through clear awareness of these differences. The feminist discourse is currently distinguished by the following three principal positions regarding the possible interpretation of female and male gender roles, suitable ways of reshaping gender relations and, starting from this basis, a catalogue of key concerns of equality policy (Aufhauser et al. 2003, 17ff):

“Gender equity” position: upholders of this position assume that women and men are or should be equal as human beings/citizens and that the significance still assigned to gender difference by society is a constructed one. Key political demands include the granting and safeguarding of equal rights for women and men (legal equality), equal treatment of women and men regarding access to different social positions, the creation of equal opportunities for women and men by removing barriers impeding the equal participation of both sexes in different areas of society, priority given to the disadvantaged sex (affirmative action) as well as the proportionate distribution of social resources (justice).

Typically, this position informs the actions of persons working towards greater equality between women and men either within institutions (companies, organisations, administrative bodies) or from institutions vis-à-vis the outside world. The equality policy pursued by the European Union, too, focuses primarily on the safeguarding of gender equity and in this connection has been repeatedly and explicitly aiming at creating equal opportunities.

“Gender difference” position: upholders of this position assume that fundamental differences between women and men exist, as do gendered qualities, skills and potentials. The central point of their criticism is levelled at the dominance of male values and concerns in the shaping of social life. Differences between women and men should be viewed positively and endowed with equal social rights and resources, it is argued. Key political demands focus on

4 Overview about the implementation of gender mainstreaming in Austria: <http://www.imag-gendermainstreaming.at>

the promotion, recognition and improved social integration of women, of women's skills, needs and networks and of "typically female" assets in general.

Seen historically, the emphasis on gender difference is on the one hand closely linked to conservative ("bourgeois") philosophy but on the other hand also underlies the concerns and demands of the autonomous women's movement. The latter group is interested in breaking up the social hierarchy between women and men that was and still is tied to the conservative institutionalisation of gender difference.

"Gender diversity" position: upholders of this position assume that binary categories of thought, i.e. "female"– "male", as well as the institutionalisation of this manner of thinking have prevented, impeded, hidden, and entailed ignorance of the many diverse ways in which femininity and masculinity are lived and experienced in our modern societies. The key political demand is to enable manifold ways of being and living as a woman or as a man and of conceiving of female and male roles (gender diversity). For this purpose, it is essential to launch social processes that do not by necessity entail any binary ascriptions in the life concepts of women and men.

It is assumed that **"equality between women and men"** can only be attained by lowering the barriers to the equal participation of women and men in all areas of society (equity aspect of equality), reevaluating and improving the social recognition of "typically female" assets (difference aspect of equality) and eliminating binary approaches embedded in categories of "typically female" and "typically male"(diversity aspect of equality).

The long-term result of a society based on true equality is **"gender democracy"**. In this design for a democratic society, the same rights are enjoyed by different social groups. Primarily, this signifies the dismantling of the conditions of male supremacy. The implementation of the objective of gender democracy calls for a new gender culture whose values, standards and social practices are able to tap into the potential of all members of society. Women and men must enter into a meaningful dialogue to be able to participate actively in the processes of change.

In Austria, the number of actors in the field of equality policy has increased dramatically over the past 15 years. Inter alia, this has entailed a process of decentralisation, regionalisation and localisation of equality-policy institutions. The spatial multi-level system that is increasingly determining regional policy is thus increasingly finding its counterpart in a multi-level system of equality policy.

3 How much does it cost not to implement gender equality in rural policy?

In the ongoing discussion about implementing equality between women and men or gender mainstreaming in regional policy many actors are asking: "How can regional policy benefit when we are intensifying our commitment to equality between women and men?", or "Which costs will arise if we fail to do so?" Taking account of gender sensitivity is often handled as an additional task by political and regional actors (Herzog et. al. 2003). It is seen as a requirement that should be met in the development and implementation of regional programmes, guidelines, strategies, measures and projects in addition to other issues, such as e.g. environmental impact analyses. In economically difficult periods, political actors often do not find it necessary to treat the gender aspect as a prime issue. Gender-sensitive approaches are suitable for times of economic upswing, many of them believe. Yet numerous international examples show that gender sensitivity and a commitment to equality, apart from political and social benefits, above all entails economic advantages for the development of a country, region or enterprise.

Equality between women and men and between different social groups correlates directly with the economic growth of a nation or a region. This is a mutual effect: while economic growth is seen to improve equality between women and men in general, also gender equality

entails economic growth. Each society needs the participation of all its members to develop optimally. Thus, if women obtain better access to the labour market, when the female employment rate rises, general economic productivity will increase as well. In times of dwindling birth rates and a growing number of old aged people, the participation of women in gainful employment, and hence in economic productivity, is becoming more and more important.

For regional policy the gender dimension becomes relevant if effectiveness and efficiency of public subsidies are called into question (Fries, 2000). In case of the structural fund policy of the European Union the optimum use of human potential is seen as a key concern. To ensure the best possible effect of the Structural Funds, regional economies should involve all actors of regions into the planning and implementation of interventions. Moreover, involving the widest possible share of the population in the definition of objectives and the planning of measures increases the effectiveness and sustainability of regional development processes because the different needs and interests of different groups of population are better represented through broad participation (Oedl-Wieser 2002).

Improving the life quality for the regional population is regarded as one of the central tasks also of rural development (BMLFUW 2003). To create the highest possible quality of facilities and services for all inhabitants of a region also means preventing the exodus of certain population groups e.g. young people, highly qualified workers, women, etc. and thus keeping the available human potential in the region. Many politicians tend to use the argument that equality sensitivity will duly entail higher quality of life. In this, the emphasis lies on the welfare of all inhabitants and on the legitimacy of implemented policies under participation of all interest groups.

However, it should be pointed out that win-win situations are not always possible in the case of reorganisation of gender relations on regional level. In many areas, resources and power will have to be redistributed to give a fair share to formerly disadvantaged groups – which often include women. Economically speaking, men might be the losers here if we assume that increased participation in care-giving work might entail a reduction of their income. However, from the social perspective, men will rather be winners, as greater involvement in care-giving work may also mean increased social competence, exactly as a reduction of the volume of paid work may lead to greater quality of life and more leisure time. Generally, the objective should be an improved social balance between women and men in the regions.

4 How is gender equality implemented in the Austrian RDP?

The cross cutting question “Gender equality: the living and working conditions for women in rural areas” was formulated as additional national question in Austria and was evaluated in the Mid-Term-Review of the Austrian RDP⁵. Because of the funding of the Austrian RDP from EAAGF-Guarantee it was formally not necessary to make an evaluation on gender equality in respect to the recommendations of the Technical Paper 3 of the European Commission “Mainstreaming Equal Opportunities For Women and Men in Structural Fund Programmes and Projects” (2000).

Since the Treaty of Amsterdam 1997 equality of women and men is one of the main general objectives, which has to be implemented in all activities of the European Union. In the guidelines of the structural funds for the programme period 2000 – 2006⁶ it is regulated that the promotion of gender equality has not only to be implemented in the social but also in the regional objectives. In this context it is important to consider that the EAAGF-Guarantee subsidises people only to a small extent e.g. setting-up of farmers, vocational training and a number of diversification measures (article 33). Compensatory allowances for less favoured areas,

⁵ The following explanations are the results of the evaluation of this cross cutting question (Oedl-Wieser 2004).

⁶ Council Regulation (EC) No 1260/1999 of 21. June 1999. Laying down general provisions on the Structural Funds, ABl. L 161 26.6.1999

agri-environmental measures and investment in agricultural holdings are financed to a much larger extent. This means, that the direct incorporation of women specific and/or gender sensitive measures is rather difficult in the RDP. The inclusion of gender sensitive measures has to be evaluated rather through its effects which are the results of these interventions.

The importance of women for the regional and rural development is often emphasised by the European Union⁷. In the Memorandum of the Council of the European Union from April 2002 the principle of equality between women and men in rural areas is seen as indispensable and particularly relevant rural development (Rat der EU 2002).

Important points in evaluating the Austrian RDP in respect to equality between women and men were in this context: (1) Were the different living and working conditions of men and women in rural areas considered in the formulation of the (general) objectives and measures of RDP? (ii) Can women benefit adequately from the economical and environmental interventions of the RDP? (iii) Are women to a sufficient extent participating in the agrarian and regional development processes?

Political relevant issues, which are caused by gender roles are often marginalized questions and are perceived in a very simple way. Neglecting gender issues can lead to a reduction of the relevance and the efficiency of interventions. If development processes in rural areas should improve in the long-term, the potentials of women must be seen and taken into consideration. The importance of rural women for the rural development is often emphasized by the European Union. In the Memorandum of the Council from April 2002 the implementation of the principle of gender mainstreaming is considered as absolutely necessary and urgent (Rat der EU 2002, 2).

In the programme planning period of the Austrian RDP there were some discussions with environmental organisations but no contact with gender experts. In this context it is important to mention, that experts on women and gender issues can formulate and analyse important questions and incentives with respect to the specific (disadvantaged) situation and specific strengths and potentials of women. It lies in the hands of the experts in their field of activity to implement the results and suggestions in their work.

In chapter 6 "Equality between men and women" the RDP provides an overview about the situation of women in rural labour markets and their educational level. Furthermore information was given about the age structure of men and women in the agricultural sector. Additional to this rather sketchy information the statistical base is from the 1980ies and early 1990ies and for this topic not so relevant any more. It would have been necessary to make a gender-sensitive regional analysis to get significant information about the living and working conditions in rural areas. It is important to see women not in general as homogenous and/or disadvantaged group. Women have different educational levels, marital status, belong to different age groups, belonging to different social classes and/or minorities. The all have different potentials and needs. It is one of the first necessary activities to have a budget for a gender-sensitive regional analysis. In chapter 6 there was formulated a general clause in the RDP (BMLFUW 2003, 148) that all measures of the RDP are accessible for both men and women. This formal declaration to take care of equality between men and women in the RDP was not followed through the creation of some women-specific or gender-sensitive measures. To improve and strengthen the situation and position of women in the Austrian agriculture it is necessary to make systematic interventions and be pro-active.

In the Ex-ante Evaluation gender equality was not an issue of analysis. In the recommendations for the evaluation and monitoring only a few indicators could be found: e.g. new or secured working places – subdivided in men and women. In comparison to RDP the LEADER+

⁷ Rat der Europäischen Union (2002): Memorandum des Vorsitizes für den Rat – Der entscheidende Beitrag der Frauen zur Entwicklung des ländlichen Raums. 7645/1/02 REV 1, AGRISTR 5. Brüssel; Kommission der Europäischen Gemeinschaften (2000): Frauen in der Entwicklung des ländlichen Raums. Für eine sichere Zukunft des ländlichen Raums in Europa. Luxemburg: Amt für amtliche Veröffentlichungen der EU; Kommission der Europäischen Gemeinschaften (2002): Agriculture. The spotlight on women. Luxemburg: Amt der amtlichen Veröffentlichungen der EU; European Commission: Implementation of gender mainstreaming in the Structural Funds programming documents 2000 – 2006. COM(2002) 748 final. Brussels 2002

initiative, which is financed by EAGGF-Guidance, has to implement the regulation VO (EG) 1260/1999. The promotion of gender equality is a main objective and it is obligatory for project managers to make a ranking of activities addressing the following assessment: The project is (i) gender-neutral, (ii) gender oriented or (iii) gender promoting.

5 How to “mainstream” gender into regional/rural development in Austria?

As we know from the discussion above issues on gender equality and gender mainstreaming are not seen as a priority in the regional/rural policy. For the inclusion of gender equality into regional/rural policy it is crucial that – in a first step – the stakeholders on political, administration and project level become aware and sensible for gender equality issues in their field of work. To reach a substantial and long-lasting effect of gender mainstreaming in the regional/rural policy some further steps like “personal commitment” and “know-how” are necessary. The building up of gender competence of the stakeholders in the rural developing process requires various instruments, tools and strategies on different levels⁸. They reach from gender training, gender-sensible language to gender-sensible regional analysis, gender equality indicators, gender impact assessments, gender audit, gender balance in decision making to establishing gender budgets⁹. The following recommendations should give an overview and incentives for implementing gender equality in rural development (programmes) (Oedl-Wieser 2004) :

- The process of GM should start in the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, Environment and Water Management (BMLFUW) and should be expanded to all levels of RDP: programme planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation. In the sense of top down and trickle down the support of persons in decisive positions is essential. But it is necessary to plan in time a budget for the financial and administrative frame.
- The embodiment of gender sensitivity and gender equality in regional/rural policy is only successful when the different institutional, political and social backgrounds of the actors in these fields are reflected and the communication between these stakeholders is continuing.
- Using the expertise of gender-experts and available information: Gender mainstreaming representatives on regional, Länder and national level, GeM Koordinationsstelle, data basis “experts on gender mainstreaming” or consulting and training, handbooks, manuals, info-material, etc.
- For improving and strengthening gender equality in rural areas in a long-term perspective systematic and pro-active interventions are necessary. In the dual sense of gender mainstreaming promoting women and gender specific measures it is necessary to formulate and implement specific actions for women in the RDP. The recommendations of the “Technical Paper 3: Mainstreaming Equal Opportunities For Women And Men In Structural Fund Programmes And Projects” (European Commission 2000a) should be applied also on the RDP which is financed by the EAGGF-Guarantee.
- Project managers should have the commitment to explain how gender mainstreaming will be implemented in the project and which strategies they have for strengthening

⁸ There exists already a big variety of support structures and info-materials for implementing gender mainstreaming in Austria. Examples are: Interventions for gender equality in regional policy (Aufhauser et al. 2003, 188ff); GeM-Koordinationsstelle (<http://www.gem.or.at/>), data bank “experts on gender mainstreaming” (<http://www.imag-gendermainstreaming.at/>); „Wie „gender“ ich Projekte? Ein praktischer Leitfaden zum Gender Mainstream in EU-Projekten” (Amt der Salzburger Landesregierung 2003) or „EU-Regionalpolitik und Gender Mainstreaming in Österreich. Anwendung und Entwicklungsansätze im Rahmen der regionalen Zielprogramme” (Gindl et al. 2004).

⁹ For methods and tools see: Stiegler (2002), Pimminger (2001), Rees (2002), NDP (2002), Taylor et.al. (2001), Shortall and Roisin (2001), Fitzgerald (2002), Fitzgerald and Michie (2000)

the awareness of gender equality. They should also have to collect gender-specific data and information on project leaders and members of the projects.

- To gain gender-specific information about investment pattern of female and male farmers (diversifying vs. intensifying) on farms and different attitudes towards ecology, sustainability and alternative production in agriculture of women and men there should be made some socio-economic surveys. This could be done in the Ex-post Evaluation of RDP or in an accompanying, additional expertise which is made for the following programme period.
- It should become standard to use a gender-sensitive language in the documents of RDP, in the evaluation reports and other publications and information material.
- In “Towards a community framework Strategy on Gender Equality (2001 - 2005) (European Commission 2000b), the main strategic statement on gender equality, NGO’s are emphasized as very important stakeholders in implementing gender mainstreaming. For this reason it is important during the implementation of the RDP to get in contact with NGO’s and experts on gender issues. It should be planned some budget for this gender expertise.
- To ensure the transparency and to improve an active public relation strategy during the implementation of RDP it would be necessary to establish a discussion forum or an adequate instrument for monitoring and controlling the programme. The information about the implementing process of RDP should also be accessible for organisations and experts on women-issues and gender-issues.
- It is necessary to establish small budget funds in the RDP for women/gender specific issues e.g. trans-national events and to finance pilot projects on these issues. These funds and projects should be financed in addition to other gender-sensible measures and objects in the RDP.
- Networking is one of the most important activities in regional and rural development. To promote networking among women in rural areas some financing should be granted by the RDP.
- Supporting structures for implementing gender mainstreaming in the structural funds e.g. GeM-Koordinationsstelle of ESF could also be a model for the following period for the RDP.
- The big variety of farm women and rural women in general should be taken into account when formulating programmes and measures. It should be an objective too, to create a positive climate for this big variety of live models of men and women through the RDP in rural areas.
- For the following programme period 2007 – 2013 it is necessary to make a gender-sensitive regional analysis to have gender-disaggregated data on local/regional level. This would be the basis for analysing gender-specific effects of regional/rural policy and for formulating women- and gender-specific objectives and measures in the programme.

Thinking in terms of programme planning periods of the structural funds of the European Union it is necessary to start right now to think about strategies for implementing gender mainstreaming in the next Austrian Rural Development Programme.

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