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Mainstreaming : a hero of lost causes?

Diffusion and transfer of a policy instrument in the European environmental, gender and urban policies.

In the world of public policy, waves of innovations and new policy developments are usually followed by movements of rationalisation. In this context, the creation of instruments of cooperation and coordination is a classic policy response to rationalise public policy. We argue that mainstreaming is one of those policy instruments. Indeed, considering recent negotiations on the EU's budget, mainstreaming has emerged as a policy instrument dedicated to the rationalisation of European finances and policies. In that sense, mainstreaming can be considered as a highly innovative instrument, whose introduction and diffusion in different policy sectors took place when other stronger mechanisms of coordination have failed. Based on a longitudinal and a comparative analysis of mainstreaming, its diffusion across several EU policy domains (environment, gender and urban), and its restructuring, we assume that this policy instrument has contributed to shaping this process of rationalisation. We will *firstly* characterize mainstreaming and clarify its relationship with the integration principle across sectors. *Secondly*, we will develop original assumptions on the diffusion of mainstreaming, by systematically analysing logics of instrumentation in three European policy domains, as well as its relationship with the rationalisation of European finances and policies. *Thirdly*, we will argue that the logic of mainstreaming leads to similar unintended effects across sectors.

Le mainstreaming, Héros des causes perdues ? Diffusion et transfert d'instrument dans les politiques environnementale, urbaine et d'égalité de l'Union européenne.

A partir d'une analyse comparée de l'émergence et des effets du mainstreaming dans trois secteurs de l'action publique européenne (environnement, égalité et anti-discrimination, urbain), cet article a pour objet d'identifier les mécanismes de transfert et de diffusion à l'œuvre. Le mainstreaming est un instrument qui s'est particulièrement développé dans un certain type de politiques européennes depuis une quinzaine d'années, en lien avec le principe d'intégration. Ces politiques se caractérisent par leur faible ou incertaine légitimité et institutionnalisation, par des objets multidimensionnels, polysémiques et ambigus, par des frontières floues, par le rôle central joué par la dimension du militantisme, y compris au sein de l'appareil politico-administratif. Le papier s'organisera autour de l'hypothèse selon laquelle le mainstreaming produit des effets similaires dans des secteurs différents et dispose donc de caractéristiques spécifiques, notamment en termes de rationalisation de l'action publique. Le premier objectif du papier sera de qualifier le mainstreaming (principe, instrument, etc.) et de clarifier sa relation avec le principe d'intégration. Nous développerons ensuite des hypothèses relatives à la diffusion de cet instrument d'action publique dans trois politiques publiques européennes, en identifiant de manière systématique les logiques d'instrumentation à l'œuvre. Enfin, nous montrerons que la dynamique propre au mainstreaming produit des effets inattendus sur les politiques publiques concernées.

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In the world of public policy, waves of innovations and new policy developments are usually followed by movements of rationalisation. The historical neo-institutionalist literature provides many examples of change through rationalisation following long period of various international sedimentation, layering and growing contradictions (Streeck and Thelen, 2005). In the EU as elsewhere, most policy domains, progressively became institutionalised through various institutionalisation processes and the sedimentation of policy instruments thus progressively creating a *mille feuilles*, within which contradictions take place, hence the drive in due course either to add another layer, to change the institution or to create new instruments to rationalise existing ones. The creation of meta-instruments of cooperation, i.e. in the sense of C. Hood (1983), instruments to coordinate and make more effective existing policy instruments (planning, organization charts, framework agreements) is therefore a classic policy response to rationalise public policy. Designing meta-instruments is supposed to enable coordination of the traditional instruments. In that sense, Mainstreaming can be considered as a relatively innovative instrument, whose introduction took place when other stronger mechanisms of coordination have failed. Mainstreaming is one of those meta-policy instruments.

The paper is based upon empirical research in three contrasting European public policy domains: gender, environment, urban. At some point, using the policy instrument approach to understand policy changes in our research (see Jacquot, 2006; Halpern and Le Galès, 2008), we all identified the use of a strange beast, something called “mainstreaming”¹. The starting point of the paper is therefore to identify the career of this “mainstreaming” analysed as a policy instrument in three different EU policy sectors, by concentrating on its origins, its circulation, and its implementation.

Drawing on the work done by Lascoumes and Le Galès (2007), we suggest that policy instruments such as mainstreaming, are a particular type of institutions. They have impacts of their own, which result either from their generic dimension, or from constraints that are specific to the political system and the policy field in which they develop and they are used in different ways. As a device that is both technical and social, policy instruments such as mainstreaming contribute to stabilising the representation of an issue, to legitimating some actors and excluding others, to allowing collective action. However, there is no determinism here and the conditions of the implementation together with the practice of the actors can live to very different outcomes. Within the EU (and beyond), it is therefore useful to disconnect policy instruments from political goals in order to analyse policy formulation, implementation and changes.

Based on a longitudinal and a comparative analysis of mainstreaming, its diffusion from the international level towards the EU and across several EU policy domains (environment, gender and urban), and its changing form over time and across sectors, we assume that this policy instrument has contributed to shape this process of policy rationalisation at the EU level. We define mainstreaming as both a process and an instrument through which specific issues, such as environmental, gender or urban issues, are addressed horizontally and systematically incorporated at all stages of the policy-making and in the governance system. We want to show in the paper how the introduction and diffusion of mainstreaming is first explained by the failure of a sectoral approach to transectoral issues. Mainstreaming is supposed to strengthen the steering capacity through the systematic use of precise tools and techniques, it also has a major political dimension, i.e. rationalise organisational and financial resources. Indeed, as observed in three different EU policy domains, the introduction, the circulation and

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the implementation of the mainstreaming policy instrument directly alter existing institutional arrangements, and lead to similar effects in terms of rationalisation, re-organisation, and sometimes marginalisation of the policy sector within EU policy.

We will *firstly* characterize mainstreaming and clarify its relationship with the integration principle, a paramount principle in both the European environmental and gender equality policies over the past decades and now in the cohesion/urban policy. *Secondly*, we will develop original assumptions on the diffusion of mainstreaming, by systematically analysing logics of instrumentation in three European policy domains, as well as its relationship with the rationalisation of European finances and policies. Indeed, the policy instrument approach somewhat contributes to the understanding of diffusion processes. *Thirdly*, we will argue that the logic of mainstreaming leads to similar unintended effects across sectors: what if mainstreaming was indeed an “old wine in a new bottle” (Jordan and Schout, 2006)? Or, looking back in different sectors in which it was introduced, what if mainstreaming was a hero of lost causes?

1. The “invention” of mainstreaming as an international norm of public policy.

The development of mainstreaming is characterized by overlapping loops across political levels (international and European) and across policy domains (environment, gender, urban). Mainstreaming is particularly striking given its scope and ambition. Indeed, mainstreaming implies the systematic horizontal incorporation of a given political priority in all public policies and at all the stages of the policy process. Its novelty aspect, both at international and European levels, is linked to an efficiency concept. The rhetoric of innovation and of differentiation with past techniques also induces a symbolic effect in order to attract renewed political attention towards policy domains whose implementation led to lukewarm results. Although Mainstreaming is often presented as a “claimed innovation” (Lascoumes and Le Galès, 2004: 359) by EU officials, especially from the EU Commission, the idea of mainstreaming has its roots in the international debate on the issue of development, particularly vivid in the 1970s in a time of cold war and rival influence over third world countries (Greene, 2005).

As a norm, Mainstreaming first appeared during the 1972 UN Stockholm Conference on Human Development and its development is closely linked to the integration principle, which is nowadays considered as a paramount principle in both international and European law (Nollkaemper, 2002 : 24). The integration principle was then introduced at the EU level in the environmental policy domain, while it was taken up by women’s organizations after the UN Nairobi Conference on Women (1985) as a mean to promote gender equality (Jacquot, 2006 : 111). However, Mainstreaming only emerged under this label during the UN Beijing Conference on Women (1995) and was first introduced in the EU gender equality policy, before its started its journey across other EU and international policies.

In order to analytically disentangle mutual influences and cross-levels and cross-sectors diffusion paths, this sections deals with the dynamics at work in the “invention” of the notion of mainstreaming at the international level, whereas the dynamics at work in its “reinvention” under the form of a meta-instrument at the EU level will be addressed in the second section of the article.

From the integration principle to Mainstreaming.

The idea of mainstreaming is closely linked with the debates that surrounded the emergence of new issues on the international agenda in the early 1970s, e.g., environmental protection, Women’s Rights, demography, etc., and with the development of transnational advocacy networks. In this context, the organization of series of thematic UN conferences aimed at mobilizing a wide range of actors and at stimulating a renewed interest in translating broad concerns into a new generation of international norms, agencies and programmes (Taylor and Curtis, 2005: 419). The role of social movements organizations was central in the emergence of new issues on the international agenda (Dalton et al., 2003), via national official representatives at first, and later directly at international level. Both in the environmental and the gender equality sectors, UN organizations relied on the information and the knowledge gathered by NGOs in order to develop specific programmes, policies and agencies (Willets, 1996).

The pioneering 1972 UN Stockholm Conference on Human Development was the first one to tackle the interrelationship between mass-poverty and environmental protection (Greene, 2005). Although the conference had been designed in order to address primarily ecological issues, an alternative (and more political) representation of environmental protection progressively emerged at international level under the pressure of the development policy community NGOs. It directly led to two specific outcomes. One of the numerous tasks assigned to the UN Environmental Programme (UNEP) in 1972 was to take into account the interdependence between the issues of development and environment protection. Furthermore, the debates that surrounded the creation of UNEP led to the formulation of the integration principle, which was later introduced in international environmental law. Although there was (and still is) no clear understanding at international level on this principle's meaning and status (Nollkaemper, 2002: 24), it was considered as a possible solution to the problems, e.g., coordination, political will, etc., raised by a sectoral approach of environmental issues and to environmental-poverty linkage.

In the context of the existing North – South divide within international organizations in the early 1970s, the idea of mainstreaming as well as the integration principle benefited from a major political visibility. On one hand, this attention explains why the Stockholm Conference was then used as a model for a series of similar UN events that addressed interlinked and cross-sectoral issues, such as the food crisis, urbanization, human rights, social development or gender equality. It also explains why the environmental case is considered as a milestone in the emergence and diffusion of mainstreaming towards other sectors, as well as the point of departure of a long-term career across policy domains and political levels. As a matter of fact, in view of the results achieved in Stockholm, Women social movement organizations, such as Women In Development (WID) and Development Alternatives for Women of a New Era (DAWN), invested actively at international level. Building on the outcomes of the Women's Decade on "Equality, Development, Peace" (1975), of previous UN conferences on Women, e.g., Mexico (1975), Copenhagen (1980) and Nairobi (1985), the UN World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995 formally introduced the definition of gender mainstreaming as the adequate policy instrument to reach gender equality in sectors such as health, violence, education and vocational training, economy, decision-making, human rights or the environment.

On the other hand, in the environmental policy community, and especially among the representatives environmental NGOs (Princen and Finger, 1994: 16), the idea of mainstreaming was not considered as the main outcome of the Stockholm Conference: it was rather seen as a threat against the development of autonomous environmental policies at international, regional and national levels. Thus, environmental mainstreaming only emerged under this label in the International environmental policy in the Millenium Declaration (2000) (UNDP, 2004: 9). Three decades later, as coordination had become a major issue in this policy domain, environmental mainstreaming was introduced in order to mobilise actors and resources, and to reorganise UN programmes, policies and agencies in order to address the climate change agenda. However, and until then, environmental mainstreaming never existed as such.

The origins of Mainstreaming.

The interrelated and increasing visibility and institutionalization of mainstreaming has certainly peculiarities in different fields in which it emerges. From the start, in the environmental domain, the integration principle and then mainstreaming as its implementation tool, are based on the idea that environmental protection and economic and social development are compatible goals and that awareness of shared responsibility as well as common synergies have to be developed amongst actors.

By contrast, in the gender equality domain, the resort to mainstreaming takes on a little more defensive stance. The role of DAWN was essential in channelling the process of diffusion of mainstreaming towards the gender equality policy domain, and to its transformation into an international norm of public policy. Indeed, this network of Southern Women's activists and academics, working in partnership with international NGOs specialized in the field of gender and social development, contested the efficiency of the WID approach, that is to say the integration of women in development, which has evolved in the creation of "WID bureaux", "WID programmes", etc., later considered as "WID ghettos" and made responsible for the marginalisation of women and feminist approaches to development (Reanda, 1999). In preparation of the Beijing UN Conference on Women (1995), the debates within the

newly created Gender In Development (GAD) Programme progressively led to the labelling of the integration principle as “Gender Mainstreaming”. Aiming at correcting the pitfalls of the WID approach, Gender mainstreaming is then, in the first sense, the expression of a will to integrate gender equality and gendered consequences of public action in the mainstream of public policies.

Since the late 1990s, mainstreaming has reached the status of an international norm, acting as a social institution, influencing the behaviour of States and international organization and both considered as necessary (even in the absence of reward or sanction) and legitimate (see Florini, 1996). Referring to the creation of an international consensus and the large adoption of a norm, Martha Finnemore and Kathryn Sikkink coined the expression “norm cascade” (1998), which seems appropriate to convey the idea of the flood linked to the diffusion of mainstreaming. Gender mainstreaming, for example, has been adopted, between 1995 and 2000, by more than 100 national governments, the whole UN system and most of the international organizations – World Bank, IMF, OECD, WLO, EU, Council of Europe, the Commonwealth, etc (Jacquot, 2008; UNDP, 2004). This makes it an “unprecedented” (True and Mintrom, 2001: 27) example of norm diffusion.

The emergence of mainstreaming, whether in environment or in gender equality, whether as a mere idea or as a norm of public policy, is based on a similar dynamic at the international level – which we will find again at the EU level: the will to find an alternative approach to policies deemed to be unsuccessful. Mainstreaming has the double benefit to bring a fresh approach and a flavour of policy innovation along with a possible solution to the problems (e.g. coordination, political will, agenda-setting, governability, etc.) raised by a sectoral approach of systemic issues. This process of diffusion across sectors also shows the key role of specific policy community actors in designing, labelling and operationalizing (i.e., integration principle, gender mainstreaming) this innovation according to the policy context

2. The emergence of mainstreaming across three EU policy sectors: diffusion and instrumentation.

The diffusion of mainstreaming between the UN and the EU – or the international and the European arenas – is a pendulum process with back and forth movements. On the EU side, two main sequences can be distinguished in this diffusion process towards the EU: a first moment of emergence of mainstreaming, during which the actors of the development policy community play a prominent role; a second moment of systematisation and diffusion of the instrument in new policy sectors, during which the link with “new governance” is central. The policy instrument approach therefore contributes to understanding how diffusion processes progressively led to the emergence of mainstreaming at EU level as a meta-instrument and as such, as a major driving force behind the rationalisation of European finances and policies.

The emergence of Mainstreaming at EU level: the role of policy community actors.

In this section, we show that cross-level diffusion processes within each policy domain channelled the emergence of mainstreaming at EU level, as a mere principle in the environmental case and as a policy instrument in the gender equality case, that combines a cognitive and a procedural dimension.

Our empirical findings show that in the environmental policy domain, community actors proceeded to the transposition of the integration principle as part of a large set of measures derived from international law. International regulation legitimized the development of EU legislation, even in policy domains that are not mentioned by treaties. In the environmental policy domain, the transposition of international regulation led to the introduction of a large set of measures, among which were solutions still in need of finding their problems. Indeed, the lack of clarity of the integration principle was replicated at the EU level when it was first introduced in the Single European Act in 1986 and the article 130 R. 2 (in Title 7 on the environment policy), since member states could not agree upon a common definition. As is often the case, this did not prevent the formulation of an “ambiguous consensus” (Palier, 2004) allowing, perhaps accelerating, the formal introduction of this notion in the Single European Act but hindering its operationalization through a specific policy instrument. Insofar as this very broad principle of integration was not clarified in terms of policy objectives, instruments, or some sort of a blueprint, it

offered an important margin of manoeuvre for actors to define the contours of their environmental liabilities and to define an implementation strategy (Lascoumes, 2008).

Does environmental mainstreaming even exist at EU level? A closer look at the evolution of the EU environmental policy instruments shows that no environmental mainstreaming instrument ever existed, and it is not even mentioned as such in the literature (see Lenschow, 1997; 2002) as opposed to the situation observed in the EU gender or education policy domains for example. Indeed, the instrumentation of mainstreaming, i.e. the set of problems posed by the choice and use of instruments (techniques, methods of operation, devices) that allow government policy to be made material and operational (Lascoumes and Le Galès, 2007: 4), was blocked due to several factors.

Unlike the principle of environmental protection for example (McCormick, 2001), the integration principle was not considered as a main driving force behind the development of an autonomous European environmental policy by policy community actors, at EU level, e.g., Commission's officials, environmental NGOs, and at national level, especially in so-called "green" Member States, e.g., the Netherlands, the FRG and later Denmark (Halpern 2009). Until the Single Act, issues such as coordination, political will, interrelationship with development issues, etc. were not considered as a priority by policy community actors, who primarily aimed at securing the formal recognition of the European Community's competence over environmental issues. Moreover, the actors in charge of the elaboration of "green measures" at EU level, and especially Commission's officials (Weale, 2002 : 89) draw on international environmental law, which is characterized by a scientific conception of environmental issues and addresses these issues vertically (water, air, soil, products, etc.). Thus, the usage of the integration principle remained relatively marginal during the earliest stage of the development of the European environmental policy.

In this context, the emergence of mainstreaming as a policy instrument was hindered until the late 1990s. Policy instruments are usually meant to stabilize the framing of a problem, or the issues related to a specific problem. In the environmental case in particular, the goals, the policy objectives have proved ambitious, with multiple dimensions, different time lengths and contradictory at times, going in many directions. Competition between different frames of what the environment policy should be was and remained very vivid. Insofar as mainstreaming would have been designed in order to create synergies and to mobilize actors and resources in the environmental policy domain, it failed in creating a sense of collective responsibility around environmental issues.

By contrast, the introduction of mainstreaming in the EU gender equality policy contributed to the stabilisation of an alternative representation of the issues at stake. In this policy domain, and as indicated above, drawing on the outcome of the UN Conferences on Women and on the environmental case in order to legitimize the introduction of mainstreaming, gender mainstreaming was included for the first time in an European document in the third Action Programme on Equality between Women and Men (1991-1995), drafted in 1988-1989. Gender Mainstreaming was then integrated in the Amsterdam Treaties with article 3. 2, which states that all the policies and actions of the EU aim at eliminating gender inequalities and at promoting equality between women and men.

Gender Mainstreaming emerged at EU level as a solution to combat gender inequality in a later stage of this policy's development. Indeed, gender equality had been included in the Treaty of Rome (article 119), and with a corpus of 13 directives, gender equality policy was considered as one of the densest domains of European social policy (Cram, 1997). For many years, gender equality policy was a paragon of the Community Method of integration (Jacquot, 2009). It was primarily implemented through legislative and budgetary policy instruments. However, at the beginning of the 1990s, gender equality policy entered a period of crisis. In light of studies released by expert networks on gender equality, the gender equality policy community and member states' representatives began to acknowledge the fact that despite more than 15 years of active and interventionist Community action, the actual inequalities between women and men in the workplace and on the labour market had not significantly been reduced. During this first period, the circulation of ideas and of actors between the international and the EU levels strongly influenced the emergence of mainstreaming at EU level. Indeed, the OECD DAC (Development Assistance Committee) was one of the main channels of diffusion of the notion of transversal integration of specific issues in mainstream public policies. The DAC works in close partnership with its UN counterpart institutions and it is the only OECD committee to which the European Commission is a direct

and full member. The DAC experts are also experts or consultants in different services of the European Commission (Elgström, 2000) and have largely contributed to the realization of studies on mainstreaming and on a transversal approach to public problems, which have been inspiring at the EU level (Jacquot, 2006).

These experts focused on the traditional policy instruments of EU policy: the regulatory and budgetary instruments were questioned and deemed unable to remedy the inequalities between women and men. Drawing on the diagnosis that had been made a decade earlier by Women's organizations, policy objectives were re-evaluated accordingly: legislation "must" be more efficient, and positive actions should not be too specific lest they imprison women in a female "ghetto". The reassessment of classical gender equality policy instruments has gone hand in hand with efforts to learn from past experiences and to do things "differently". In this context, gender mainstreaming was highlighted and favoured as an alternative form of governance. Indeed, the adoption of mainstreaming is first explained by the failure of previous approaches, i.e. the development of a policy sector "gender inequality", and is justified because it is "transectoral". Gender inequalities exist in all sorts of domains and policy sectors, hence must be addressed through transversal policy instruments. It aims at better integrating a gender perspective into all policy EU policies so that any policy or action developed and implemented by the EU does not impede the principle of gender equality.

As such, gender mainstreaming is the result of a process of instrumental creativity by the European institutions; it is a "claimed innovation" (Lascoumes and Le Galès, op.cit.). The novelty aspect is linked to an efficiency concept. The rhetoric of innovation and of differentiation with past techniques also induced a symbolic effect – an image makeover for gender equality policy that attracted renewed political attention. Indeed, mainstreaming puts a clear focus on procedures, and it is presented as a solution to bypass the obstacles that gender equality policy and its traditional instruments had faced.

This cross-sectoral analysis of the emergence of Mainstreaming at EU level shows *in the first place* that the diffusion of Mainstreaming from the international towards the EU level in both sectors was primarily structured by policy dynamics. This is particularly true in the environmental sector, where the lack of clarity of the integration principle was replicated at EU level, thus contributing to the non-emergence of mainstreaming as a EU environmental policy instrument. But furthermore, as observed by Thatcher in the case of cross-national policy learning (2007: 263), cross-sectoral comparison shows that cross-level diffusion processes depends on other factors: the stability of policy community actors, the allocation of resources between them, problem-setting, etc. *Secondly*, the emergence of mainstreaming at EU level is based on a similar dynamic than the one observed at international level in both sectors: the will to find an alternative approach to policies deemed to be unsuccessful. The non-emergence of mainstreaming as a policy instrument in the earliest stages of the European environmental policy shows that mainstreaming was not considered as a solution to the main challenge at stake, namely the formal recognition of the principle of environmental protection in the treaties. *Thirdly*, the diffusion of Mainstreaming is not "agentless", and does not result in "spontaneous policy-making" (Dolowitz, 2000: 3). Indeed, our empirical findings in both sectors show the crucial role of actors, either policy community actors or emerging ones, in channelling the diffusion of new ideas and procedures. *Finally*, the emergence of mainstreaming as a policy instrument is closely linked to its instrumentation, i.e. to the choice and use of devices (techniques, methods of operation, etc.) that allow government policy to be made material and operational. The next section deals with a second moment of systematisation and diffusion of mainstreaming at EU level, namely its reinvention as a meta-instrument.

The reinvention of Mainstreaming as a meta-instrument: systematisation and diffusion in new European policy domains.

In the mid-1990s, more and more firmly implanted, progressively institutionalized at the EU level and benefiting from an aura of prestige linked to its UN origins, to the recent results of the Beijing Conference and to its rapid diffusion in major international organizations, mainstreaming met the craze for "new governance" growing at that time, especially since it is in line with the objectives put in the front row by the Prospective Unit of the Commission at that time (Lebessis and Paterson, 1997, 2000). More precisely, at the EU level, it is with the reflections on the "new governance" that the use and prescription

of policy instruments allowing to tackle the complexity and multidimensionality of certain issues has been systematized.

The debate on new governance is related to the evaluation of the nature of the policy objectives of the EU and of the approaches and instruments to be implemented in order to reach these objectives. The questioning of the traditional modes of governance, and especially the “*méthode communautaire*”, is focused on the forms of policy-making rather than on the substance of the programmes. The innovative character of new governance concerns the modes of governance rather than the content and scale of the public problems. In the US, in order to qualify this supposed “new governance” turn, Lester M. Salamon refers to the fundamental transformations that have happened not “in the scope and scale of government action but in its basic *forms*” (2002: 1). At the EU level, in a context of a major legitimacy crisis (Boussaguet and Jacquot, 2009), the question of public policy innovation in terms of instruments is designed to increase its efficiency, and consequently its legitimacy.

The absence of coordination between policy sectors, the vertical treatment of policy problems, the “functional segregation” aiming at reducing complexity (Lebessis and Paterson, 2000) are made largely responsible for a lack of efficiency of EU policies, i.e. the non-decreasing level of gender inequalities at work, the low compliance and the bad record of the implementation of the environment directives, the persisting high level of geographical and social segregation in European cities, etc. In line with this, the Commission White paper on governance promotes the principle of coherence (European Commission, 2001). This exercise of questioning past solutions has led to the multiplication of transversal strategies in EU policies in order to being able to govern – politically as well as administratively – multidimensional problems and to pass over the sectoral approach which is supposed to lead to inefficiency. The climax of this mainstreaming trend is certainly the constitutional project – now Lisbon Treaty. Its Title 2 (art. 7-17) on the “*provisions having general application*” states that the “*Union shall ensure consistency between its policies and activities*” and refers to the necessary transversal treatment of gender equality, environmental protection, employment, the fight against social exclusion, education and vocational training, health protection, consumers protection and the well-being of animals.

In this framework, mainstreaming – the instrument of this “consistency” – appeared to the many in the Commission as a useful solution to progress in the process of European integration without confronting the touchy question of Member States sovereignty and to develop chosen policies softly and costlessly. The logic is also to rationalise, i.e. the mainstreaming instrument is operationalised in a diverse set of more precise policy tools and techniques.

Based on an unstable combination of analytical (i.e. statistics, indicators, benchmarks, impact assessment), awareness-raising (i.e. training, good and bad practices guides, NGOs consultation) and organizational (i.e. expert groups, experience-sharing committees) tools, mainstreaming is opposed to traditional legislative and budgetary instruments (Jacquot, 2009). Its instrumentation is based on the ideas of absence of constraint, procedural functioning and transversality. The first common point of its tools is their softness; they do not imply sanctions in case of non-use. Mainstreaming is based on coordination rather than on negotiation and implies, especially compared to instruments like directives, a low political cost. The second common point is that they are inherently procedural. Mainstreaming is *a priori* constituted by a set of measures, which do not command the attribution of a specific budget. The third common point is constituted by the transversality of these tools relatively to the policy process and to the sectors of public actions potentially concerned by the problem of gender inequalities, environmental protection or segregation. The idea of mainstreaming is to take into account the many dimension of such questions and to go beyond a sectoral administrative division. Here again, mainstreaming resonates with the principles of the new modes of governance (Treib, Bähr, Falkner, 2007): decrease of the level of the constraint; implementation of procedures of cooperation and emulation; will to increase the efficiency of public policies thanks to the fight against functional segregation and compartmentalization of the problems.

The reinvention of Mainstreaming as a meta-instrument, opens new avenues for diffusion towards other EU policy domains, as shown by the urban case. The EU urban policy had a long and very slow start as there (still) is no base in the Treaty (Grazi 2006). In many ways, one could identify two path to develop an urban policy at the EU level : initiatives versus mainstreaming. The strange fate of the

European urban policy is in part explained by the fact that urban policy instruments were more or less always a version of regional policy instruments, innovations was limited (Bache 2008). A long term characteristics of the urban policy is the ongoing tension on the framing of the urban policy over several decades, economic development issues are always entangled with quality of life environment issues, and social questions, social cohesion, exclusion, segregation. The urban policy developed in the back door of regional policy. In 1988, the ERDF framework included 5 objectives including the famous objective 2 for industrial declining regions with a high level of unemployment and declining industrial employment. Partnership and additionality were operationalised as key principles. In the 1990's, Bruce Millan started a series of initiatives, networks, Urban pilot projects and later the Urban Programme which marked the heyday of the urban policy.

The innovation which appeared in the 97-99 period was the idea of urban mainstreaming. The mainstreaming instrument was only introduced in 2000 and Community initiatives programmes, which in particular benefited cities (URBAN II of course but also INTERREG and EQUAL), were still in place. In the urban case, the momentum of the rising urban policy and the multiplication of programmes was seen with worries. It must be remembered that within the DG XVI, the urban unit was often seen as a potential rival to the dynamics of the regional policy. Altogether, the funding of urban programmes never went beyond the 10% of regional policy funds, the rise of urban policy was consistently resisted within the DG Regio or DG competition. In this context, the emergence of mainstreaming in the urban policy domain was double : first to clearly set the urban policy as a sub category of the regional policy with no autonomy of difference whatsoever and second, through zoning to show the importance of cities as beneficiary of structural funds. Also, the European Investment Bank was encouraged to finance more urban projects or urban renewal, transports... within the regional policy framework. Indeed, large objectives were set for the urban dimension of the regional policy, i.e. urban sustainable development, good governance, strengthening local capacity to act, improving the competitiveness and social cohesion, etc., with a very limited set of specific policy instruments.

In a time span of two decades, we see the environmental integration principle being standardized as “mainstreaming” in the gender equality domain, and along the way being rationalized as a policy instrument – and not only a judicial principle anymore – composed of a varying set of implementation tools, and diffused across a large range of sectors. A classical example of rationalisation through a meta-instrument of cooperation, in the sense of Christopher Hood, i.e. instrument to coordinate and make more effective existing policy instrument, mainstreaming, during this process has become a ready-to-cook policy-making recipe. However, it is this seemingly neutral character which made it consensual in the three policies we are studying.

3. The logic of Mainstreaming: rationalisation, integration and symbolical political voluntarism.

Following a policy instrument approach to policy change makes sense to develop the question of implementation. Sometimes, creative actors are using instruments in innovative and unexpected kind of ways, thus reinforcing the contingent dimension of public policy implementation and the local construction of the policy. However, that's not so often the case. In previous research, we were able to show that the choice of instrument (instrumentation) led to regular effects, intended, or not intended (Lascoumes and Le Galès, 2004), a conclusion very similar to classical neo-institutionalist accounts of institutions. Mainstreaming within EU policies is a very interesting case for that set of questions. In the three policy sectors where we have identified the introduction of mainstreaming as a policy instrument was firstly justified for a similar set of reasons, i.e. similar logics of instrumentation, and secondly led to similar unintended effects.

As always with new policy instruments, there are always good reasons (which are made public, or not) for actors to choose them. Already, we have mentioned the fact that over the last decade, the pressure for innovation has become central for the commission in order to legitimize its role, in parallel to the stricter control of member states and the absence of clear political projects. Several authors have made the point about this policy instrument innovation as a strategy for the Commission to mobilise its own services and to appear as a dynamic entrepreneur in Europe (Dehousse, 2004; Tholoniati, 2010; Lenschow and Knill, 2000). In that sense, mainstreaming is one of a range of new policy instruments progressively

introduced over the last decade which gave rise to the literature on the “new” governance of the “new” Europe (Borras and Greve, 2004; Kassim and Le Galès 2010; Bruno and al., 2008). However, mainstreaming has at least three distinctive dimensions we have briefly outlined so far: rationalisation, integration, symbolic political voluntarism.

The logic of rationalisation and integration.

Rationalisation and integration have become key words in EU public policy. One cannot, in the space of this article, come back to the rationalisation debate since Weber, but this is a very classic dynamic within a given policy sector (ref XX). A public policy can be analysed as a sedimentation of programmes, institutions and policy instruments. This sedimentation leads to different effects often leading to policy changes over time (Streeck and Thelen, 2005). Beyond this endogenous logic of change, the accumulation of laws, devices, programmes, instruments, priorities, gives political entrepreneurs an opportunity to be seen to improve the efficiency and the effectiveness of a given policy sector. In particular, rationalisation emerges as a strong legitimation device for public policy change at a time of financial pressure or uncertainties about political priorities. Rationalisation and integration, like modernisation, are mantra which can be mobilised in different countries, in different context, at different periods, to manifest a vigorous political attempt aiming at increasing the performance of public policies in a given sector.

In Europe, in the late 1990's, the Santer Commission went for the managerial rationalisation of the European Commission. It stressed the need to concentrate on its core functions as keeper of the Treaties, to supervise more closely budgetary programme management, to change the management of human resources and to formalise relations with external partners (Dimier, 2003). In the post Delors period, after two decades of staunch EU integration and enlargement, rationalisation became one of the key words in different policy sectors which had faced dynamic expansion over the previous decade. Finally, the mobilisation of the rationalisation discourse suggests that things did not work so well in the past. Overcoming past failures and shortcomings is therefore central in the call for rationalisation and integration, as exemplified by the gender equality and the urban policy domains.

In the case of the gender policy, the specific goal was to “professionalise” a policy that was seen as “old-fashioned” and to reduce the considerable autonomy that the policy area has enjoyed since the mid-1970s. Introducing “mainstreaming” was seen as a way to rationalise a policy regarded as “outdated” with a diverse set of policy tools and techniques. At the beginning of the 1990s, gender equality policy entered a period of crisis as it appeared that despite more than 15 years of active and interventionist Community action, the actual inequalities between women and men in the workplace and on the labour market had not significantly been reduced. This crisis focused on the traditional policy instruments of EU policy: the regulatory and budgetary instruments were questioned and deemed unable to remedy the inequalities between women and men. Time had come for rationalisation, for questions about the use of resources, the multiplication of initiatives. Time had come for the introduction of a new instrument able to rationalise and integrate existing programmes and instruments.

As opposed to traditional legislative and budgetary instruments, gender mainstreaming is based on the ideas of procedural processes, transversality, and freedom from constraints. Gender mainstreaming is also based on coordination rather than on negotiation and implies – especially in contrast to instruments such as directives – a low political cost. Gender mainstreaming is *a priori* constituted by a set of measures that are not subject to appropriations. The principle of gender mainstreaming takes into account the many dimensions of gender inequalities, and crosses over administrative divisions, hence the dynamic of integration it is supposed to raise. It resonates with the principles of the new modes of governance which have been developing at the European level since the mid-1990s: a decrease in the level of constraint; the implementation of cooperation and emulation procedures; the quest to increase the efficiency of public policies by overcoming the functional segregation and compartmentalisation of the problems (Lebessis and Paterson, 1997).

The logic of rationalisation and integration is similar in the case of the European urban policy. At a time of marginalisation of the EU territorial cohesion policy (Hooghe 1999), rationalization meant

preventing more expenditure, getting rid of existing programmes and avoiding the rise of a new policy domain. The Enlargement, the debates and campaigns on the constitution have been central in the dynamics of the EU since the year 2000. Also, the appointment of the Barroso Commission marked a clear right wing, more neo-liberal turn (Hooghe, 1998). Regional policy, urban policy were clearly part of the Delors project of regulated capitalism with the Single Market. This agenda is not anymore part of the priorities neither of the member states, nor the Commission. Of course the position of member states vary over time. At times, the Spanish, or the French, or even the German in 2007 will make a case for an integrated EU urban policy. However, only the Dutch have proved consistent over time to promote an urban agenda during their presidency (1995, 2005) (Parkinson, 2006). Policy community actors (unsuccessfully) tried to block ongoing developments within the Council and the Commission. Member states organised a major conference of urban ministers in Lille in 2000 to approve a programme of cooperation and a Lille agenda to promote, of course, an integrated approach for urban sustainable development. Mayors met in different networks over time, including by invitation of the commission. The EU Parliament created an urban group in 2002. In 2005, the EU Parliament again produced reports to get resources for urban programmes within the structural funds and as usual pushed the idea of local autonomy. Those different groups and networks were very much involved in the preparation of an URBAN + initiative, which was eventually dropped in 2006 during the negotiation of the new regulations for 2007-2013.

Indeed, recent negotiations on the EU's budget, and especially on the attribution of structural funds for the 2007 – 2013 funding period, urban mainstreaming emerged as a policy instrument dedicated to the rationalisation of European finances and policies. Potentially, mainstreaming had a more important potential for cities but as is well known in public policy research : implementation is everything and the full logic of mainstreaming was at play for the next round of regional policy regulations. The budget negotiation for 2007-2013 limited the budget of the Commission and reinforced the pressure on the structural funds as some large countries do not benefit any more because of enlargement. As is usual in a phase of budgetary pressure, the key words of simplification, rationalisation and concentration were issued to mask a continuing decline of the EU urban and regional policy. For 2007-2013, the Commission argues precisely that the principles derived from URBAN 1 and 2 are included within the objective "convergence", i.e., former objective 1, regions with GDP less than 75% of the EU average, which get 81,54 % of the funds, and to the new second objective "regional competitiveness and employment". Member states were encouraged to focus on cities.

In comparison with the gender equality and the urban policy domains, the case of the environment, by contrast, shows the limits of the mainstreaming's logic of rationalisation and integration. In a policy domain, which is primarily structured by its instruments, and in which the capacity for instrumental innovation was limited (Halpern, 2010), the implementation of mainstreaming did not lead to a successful outcome in terms of adding a new item to the list of EU environmental policy. Re-labelled under the notion of "greening" in the Cardiff Process (1998), the idea of mainstreaming was reinvested by policy community actors in order to criticize this vertical approach to environmental issues and to contest its efficiency by promoting a logic of rationalization and integration (Lenschow, 1997; 2002). Indeed, the integration principle was enhanced in the following treaties: Maastricht stipulates that the protection of the environment has to be taken into account in the definition and implementation of the other policies of the Community; Amsterdam reinforces it with the introduction of the principle of sustainable development (art. 6). In this approach towards environmental issues, the integration principle strongly linked with the concept of sustainable development, aimed at developing a "transectoral" approach to environmental issues, not only within the Commission and other EU institutions, but in all decisions and policies in the EU at large. As such, the integration principle is today considered as the main tool for implementing the sustainable development principle, which is at the heart of the European growth strategy or "Lisbon Strategy" since the Council of Gothenburg (2001). It aims at "greening" all policies as well as economic and social activities within the EU, thus applying to at all levels of government.

However, despite this re-labelling process, the integration principle remains understood in its most limited approach by policy community actors. On one hand, the integration principle offered a serious alternative to the vertical approach to environmental issues, which had long prevailed within this policy's actors at EU level. It directly aims at reducing sectoral and geographical strategies of resistance and

inertia. On the other hand, and given its bond with the sustainable development principle, no clear operationalization and implementation strategy could stabilize at EU level. Member states had indeed very different understandings of the integration principle, a diversity of approaches and representations which led in turn to various outcomes (Baker, 1997; O’Riordan and Voisey, 1998). From a German perspective for example, the integration principle created new opportunities to achieve the ecological modernisation of national and/or European industries and to serve as an offensive trade policy; whereas from a British perspective, this principle was considered as a major rationalisation tool both at national and EU levels, at the risk of diluting the objectives of the European environmental policy. These competing representations explain that the formulation and, later, the implementation of mainstreaming as a European policy instrument within the Cardiff process did not lead to a successful outcome in terms of adding a new item to the list of EU environmental policy.

As observed earlier in our comparative analysis of the processes of emergence of mainstreaming across sectors, implementation processes were based on a similar logic, namely a logic of rationalisation and integration. Indeed, the logic of policy instrumentation channels cross-levels and cross-national diffusion processes. However, the differences observed in terms of outcome in the three different fields show that this logic combines – somewhat uneasily – with policy dynamics, and sometimes results in failure. This finding leads us to address a third dynamic behind the process of diffusion of mainstreaming: symbolic political voluntarism.

Symbolic political voluntarism and marginalisation of the policy domain

Mainstreaming is finally a policy instrument which aims at making highly visible the EU priority given to a particular policy objective. In line with the integration logic, mainstreaming was introduced and sold to political actors as an instrument aiming at raising the profile and the importance of an issue with all the policies and activities of the EU. On paper, mainstreaming could be seen as a major breakthrough. Mainstreaming gender, environmental or urban issues is advocated by the Commission as the triumph of a policy domain influencing, bending, irrigating all European policies. Our argument is that the implementation of the mainstreaming instrument has indeed led to massive reframing of various policy questions in terms of environment, gender, urban thus allowing the Commission to trumpet its successes. However we argue that this systematic reframing in EU policy documents and discourses has *de facto* led to the marginalisation of the domain, the loss of resources in institutionalised policy sectors and, *in fine*, to a growing discrepancy between EU policy discourses and implemented programmes.

Since 1996-1997, the instrumentation of mainstreaming has been at work within EU policies. Empirical research shows that the institutionalisation of gender mainstreaming has been a leverage and legitimisation instrument for some actors from the gender equality policy community (Jacquot, 2010). By adapting their means of action and their objectives to the new norm, they have been able to secure the visibility and legitimacy of gender equality on the EU agenda. Furthermore, they have been in position to use gender mainstreaming as leverage to extend the perimeter of gender equality to new fields of action, which were not part of the traditional social perimeter of European gender equality policy.

At the other end of the spectrum of gender mainstreaming usage, most of the actors involved in the implementation of gender mainstreaming at EU level – whether Commission officials from all DGs, MEPs, or social NGOs members – make a “conformist” use of the instrument. Indeed, the adoption of the new policy instrument did not raise much opposition in the gender inequality domain. This is not common as any policy change tends to foster some conflicts. This may be explained for three reasons: 1) mainstreaming was not creating a new policy sector entering in competition with others; 2) as it was supposed to be transectoral, every DG had to do something about it but without clear sanction and constraints, it was not a command a control; 3) Finally, the instrument was very legitimate politically and it would have been difficult to openly oppose it.

Gender mainstreaming has been established as a policy norm by the Treaty and by the procedures and tools developed to manage its implementation; their logic of action is consequently rational: the norm has not been incorporated by the actors, however one has to act in conformity with the norm, according to what is appropriate with regard to the rules of the institution. Most of the Commission’s civil servants

acknowledge the legitimacy of the gender equality objective and the necessity of taking it into account in their daily routines. But this administrative demand is only formally met. However, by the same token, this does not mean that the implementation of gender mainstreaming is only rhetorical or mere pretence. Gender impact studies are conducted: statistics and data are increasingly disaggregated by sex; references to gender mainstreaming and to the EU commitment to gender equality, and specific support to women candidates are integrated into the Commission's agenda. For a large portion of actors, gender mainstreaming is only a procedural instrument that cannot be converted into a resource or an opportunity. Yet it is also an institutionalised instrument, which is not questioned as such, and which has acquired a legitimate right to be implemented. Gender mainstreaming has become consensual; open resistance cannot be found but inertia and lip service are not uncommon, and the implementation of gender mainstreaming has certainly produced "no revolution" (Hafner-Burton and Pollack, 2007) in EU policies across different issue-areas. Despite the introduction of "naming and shaming" tools, most DG's within the Commission were able to fulfil the required procedures and to produce information without contributing much more than before to the fight against gender inequalities in their own fields.

On a more limited scale, the conclusion are quite similar in the urban policy. In a way, "cities" have won the argument, because of the importance of the urban level, of cities as growth engines but also level to fight poverty and employment or strategic sites to protect the environment. Cities have decisively won a discursive argument and their importance is then widely accepted in Commission's circles, beyond the DG Regio. But one unintended consequence of this importance given to cities was not to develop a more significant urban policy but rather to make visible the impact of the EU in cities through its main programmes. Systematic analysis of EU programmes and their impact in cities was therefore undertaken in order to assess the role of the employment strategy, of the Research and developments strategy, energy policy. Mainstreaming seems to have been used by the Commission as an exercise (with systematic production of reports) to show and make visible the urban dimension (defined loosely and widely) of various programmes. Urban mainstreaming has become a labelling exercise similar to what has happened in gender and the environment. This has become a characteristics of the EU urban policy : the less important, autonomous the urban policy becomes, the more various bits and pieces and urban labelling of mainstream programme takes place. In that sense, the report of the urban impact of the new regional policy for 2007-2013 is quite an achievement.

The impact of urban mainstreaming will have to be assessed. For the time being, there is no more urban autonomous initiative, the capacity to develop new programmes to develop cities has been eroded, the local autonomy is eroded and it remains to be seen whether the whole idea of an EU urban policy is not simply on the way out. Giving more visibility through communication and information instruments to a disappearing policy domain is a classic public policy strategy.

Conclusion

Mainstreaming is essentially a meta-instrument of cooperation – as defined by Christopher Hood (1983), i.e. as an instrument to coordinate existing policy instruments and make them more effective – aimed at rationalising other instruments, but also gender equality policy itself. As such, it does not follow a uniform implementation scheme, but rather one that varies according to its usage by different actors (Jacquot, 2006; Jacquot and Woll, 2004, 2008). Since there is no unified or binding model at the EU level (and at international level) determining what Mainstreaming "should be", each actor responsible for its implementation has to choose from among the aforementioned list of tools to tailor a strategy. Indeed, this article shows that mainstreaming one domain could make sense and requires important mobilisation. In some cases, as shown by the environmental case, it remains a mere judicial principle, whose instrumentation is hindered by policy dynamics or in the absence of a shared representation of the issue at stake. In this sector, policy and problem-setting dynamics channelled the diffusion of Mainstreaming. In other cases, the logic of mainstreaming achieved an important mobilization of actors and resources, thus contributing to profound policy change, to the reorganization of existing policy instruments, to its progressive marginalization and even its death in the urban case.

These findings also contribute to understanding the role of innovations in policy change. Analysing the origins, the circulation and the implementation of mainstreaming across sectors and levels shows how a mere idea progressively developed into a judicial principle, a international norm of public policy, a policy instrument and finally, into a meta-instrument of cooperation. Indeed, cross-sectoral comparison of instrumentation logics shows that the diffusion of mainstreaming, as an policy innovation, was highly selective and deeply structured by dynamics of policy change. In its most developed version, mainstreaming was introduced in ongoing policy reform processes. But in any case, the fate of mainstreaming can be seen as highly successful: in a time span of almost four decades, mainstreaming became a ready-to-cook policy-making recipe for decision-makers in search of alternative solutions for policies deemed to be unsuccessful. Its (re-)emergence under one form or another in these policy domains aimed at legitimating the intervention of a political level in domains over which they had no clear competence, at contesting existing power relations within an existing sector through the reframing of problems, or at contesting the autonomous development of a policy domain.

Indeed, its seemingly neutral (and inoffensive) character made it consensual in the three policy domains we studied. In the absence of a clear and unified definition of mainstreaming, it could easily be presented as a “claimed innovation” by decision-makers that served to making highly visible the priority given to a particular policy objective. One cannot blame the EU (and the UN) equivalent to the street level bureaucrat to play the labelling game with existing programmes in order to conform to new policy norms rather than changing behaviours and allocations of funding, a demanding task.

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