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Assessing Advocacy: European Transnational Women's Networks and Gender Mainstreaming

Abstract

This study investigates how European women's transnational advocacy networks (TANs) practice advocacy in regard to the gender mainstreaming strategy. Women's TANs face gender mainstreaming in several ways: They are considered to be hubs for organizing public dialogue on gender equality strategies in Europe. Moreover, employing mainstreaming tools has become a requirement for acquiring project funds from the European Union. Many TANs and their member groups thus work with mainstreaming. Finally, women's TANs are well positioned to observe and compare the implementation of mainstreaming through interaction with their national and regional members. The article builds on a series of interviews as well as on web-based data analysis to assess positions and advocacy of five European women's TANs in regard to gender mainstreaming. The findings suggest limited trust in and commitment to the strategy, but also limited advocacy. Women's TANs have developed a strategically distant position regarding gender mainstreaming. Lack of internal capacity, overall resource

poverty, as well as prioritizing institutional advocacy, this study suggests, might contribute to weak politicization in regard to the gender mainstreaming strategy.

Introduction

Transnational advocacy networks (TANs) have become major actors in response to globalization and transnational policy regimes (Bandy and Smith 2004; Keck and Sikkink 1998; Walby 2002). The United Nations, the WTO, the World Bank, and the European Union (EU) among others have reacted to public demands for more transparency and access by opening up political space for NGOs and TANs. Recent studies have confirmed the influence of transnational advocacy in policy arenas such as the environment (Gunter 2004; Keck and Sikkink 1998), labor standards (Brooks 2004; Klein 1999), trade (Foster 2004; Macdonald 2004), and social policy (Cullen 2004). Yet, assessments of their function and impact vary. While TANs are widely credited with establishing new frames and styles of politics as well as achieving substantial policy change (Bennett 2004), they can also be seen as providing supranational governance regimes with a convenient cloak suggesting legitimacy and accountability (Koslowski and Wiener 2002). Even though they are less publicly visible, women's TANs are among the most active networks since the 1980s (Silliman 1999; Moghadam 2000, 2005; Desai 2005; Ferree and Tripp 2006). Accelerated by the Beijing process in 1995, women's NGOs increased and institutionalized transnational co-operations in areas such as health and reproduction, environment, trade, and violence against women.

In the EU, transnational women's networks are part of a surge in advocacy fueled by the "rights based" take-off phase of European integration in the early 1990s and the shift from the "Community method" to more open multilevel governance processes. The new focus on rights gave women's groups more political leverage and mobilization tools, while multilevel governance extended the institutional spaces and settings for advocacy. Today, EU governance offers not just an occasional opening for women's NGOs and their networks. It provides regular institutional spaces, i.e., through Commission-sponsored groups and parallel NGO conferences, which in turn encourage networking among women's NGOs (Cichowski 2002, 2007; Pudrovska and Ferree 2004; Woodward 2004; Kantola 2008; Rolandsen Agustín 2008). As early as the mid-1990s, Bretherton and Sperling (1996) pointed out that European institutions and in particular the Commission actively promoted the idea of networking and, more specifically, the development

of women's networks. In addition to the rise of a network-friendly political opportunity structure, specific windows of opportunity provided contexts for transnational mobilization by women's organizations, most importantly the reform treaty initiatives and the European constitutional process (Helfferich and Kolb 2001; Lombardo 2005).

Aside from creating institutionalized space and windows of opportunity for transnational dialogue, the EU fosters transnational networking by making it a priority for awarding project funds. Programs within the European Structural Funds as well as the European Fund for Regional Development contain provisions regarding transnational cooperation and exchange of ideas among partner projects in EU member states. In order to apply for EU funding, local or regional NGOs need partners in other European countries and they have to commit to cooperation and "best practice" exchanges. Celeste Montoya in her research on the Daphne program has examined the positive effects of networking, suggesting that this institutional priority within the EU in turn advances women's transnational practices and advocacy coalitions (Montoya 2008). In effect, the EU provides favorable conditions for European women's NGOs' forming or joining a TAN. NGOs trust that by engaging in transnational networking they can maximize advocacy and influence (Keck and Sikkink 1998; Bandy and Smith 2004; Castells and Cardoso 2006).

The influence of women's NGOs and their networks on EU policies has been examined in issue arenas such as sexual harassment (Zippel 2004 and 2006), the Treaty of Amsterdam (Helfferich and Kolb 2001), the European constitution-making process (Lombardo 2005), and violence against women (Montoya 2008). Multilevel governance structures have opened up spaces for institutional advocacy, and transnational networks have gained a reputation as powerful civil society actors on European institutional stages (Kohler-Koch 1998). Current research on women's advocacy in the EU tends to highlight the institutional focus of these networks, such as Cichowski's (2002) study of the ties between EU level institutions and national or regional women's NGOs, Pudrovska and Ferree's (2004) analysis of the activities of the European Women's Lobby (EWL) on the stages of the European Parliament and the Commission, and Fuchs' (2006) assessment of EWL and the Eastern European KARAT coalition.

Yet, beyond *institutional* advocacy and lobbying, European women's transnational networks are expected to generate *public* discussion about equality strategies (Squires 2007). They are perceived to be aggregate public voices of European women's civil society groups, trying to raise the public profile of equality policies and

mobilize for women's issues through outreach activities. While we know much about TANs institutional advocacy, there seems to be less knowledge about the capacity of women's TANs to generate public voice and organize public debate. This is the focus of the following study.

This article explores TANs advocacy in regard to gender mainstreaming, a strategy that recently has fueled a string of debates in EU gender policy circles (see *Social Politics* special issue 12(3) 2005; *International Feminist Journal of Politics* special issue 7(4) 2005; *Feminist Legal Studies* special issue 10(3–4) 2002). It is an “essentially contested concept and practice” (Walby 2005, 321; Kuhl 2003) among politicians and feminist activists. Judith Squires (2005, 371), among others, suggests that “mainstreaming might be most likely to be a truly transformative strategy when technocratic expertise, social movement participation, and transnational networks are in place”. We will investigate the role of European women's transnational networks by examining their positions and advocacy on behalf of the strategy.

Advocacy is more effective if one cooperates with others. As Kohler-Koch (1998, 9) has observed, how fast ideas and policy changes travel and whether or not they arrive in national policy contexts does not only depend on specific “properties” of one network, but “also on the interface structure of related networks”. Interfaces between networks can be conceptualized as communicative relays that drive joint frames and action. Do European women's TANs have such communicative relays? Do they cooperate with each other to coordinate advocacy and maximize influence? This article attempts to contribute to our understanding of network strength by providing a web-based assessment of the ties among transnational women's networks. General network density, a detailed definition will be provided below, cannot explain all aspects of networking among women's TANs in Europe. But it can provide a first slice of heuristic evidence about structure and scope of network interfaces and cooperation.

The argument starts by exploring linkages between transnational women's networks and the gender mainstreaming strategy. I will then examine five European women's positions on gender mainstreaming by assessing interview data as well as their public engagement with the strategy on the web. The next part of the article will address advocacy in regard to mainstreaming as well as overall advocacy potential of the TANs, and finally I will assess communicative relays between networks to provide some preliminary insight into combined network strength.

Gender Mainstreaming and Women's NGOs

Gender mainstreaming is widely perceived to be the most encompassing and potentially transformative strategy that the EU has so far introduced in regard to gender equality (Rees 1998, 2005; Squires 2005; Verloo 2001, 2005). It is considered the third leg of equality policy in addition to anti-discrimination and affirmative action policies. The Council of Europe defines gender mainstreaming as “the (re)organization, improvement, development and evaluation of policy processes so that a gender equality perspective is incorporated in all policies at all levels and at all stages, by the actors normally involved in policy-making” (Council of Europe 1998, 15). Gender mainstreaming has thus shifted public and institutional focus from special programs that advance the status of women towards demanding gender sensitivity across all policy arenas within the EU. It is conceptualized as a process that engenders governance, increases public awareness of gender inequalities and commits more actors to the goal of gender equality (Lombardo 2005; Rees 2005; Verloo 2005, 2008).

Transnational women's networks have been crucial in the lobbying efforts for gender mainstreaming, succeeding with demands for its integration first into the Platform of Action of the 4th World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995 (True and Mintrom 2001). Institutionalized women's lobbies of EU member states were instrumental in pushing the UN agenda onto the European stage, claiming that the EU's traditional focus on women-targeting programs was in and of itself not sufficient to advance gender justice and parity (Pollack and Hafner-Burton 2000). Today, gender mainstreaming has been incorporated into the Amsterdam Treaty as well as into the Treaty of Lisbon as the major strategy for fighting gender inequalities.

Yet even though its radical and transformative potential is widely acknowledged, gender mainstreaming is a globally contested strategy in policy arenas ranging from the transnational down to the local level. Stephen Lewis (2006a), the United Nations Special Envoy for Aids in Africa, calls it a “cul de sac for women” and argues “there is not a single assessment of gender mainstreaming that I have read – and there have been many assessments, commissioned by donors, compiled by the UN itself, done by NGOs – that is fundamentally positive. Every single one of them ranges from the negative to an unabashed indictment” (Lewis 2006b). On the national and regional level, governments' framing and implementation of gender mainstreaming exposes unevenness and mixed results (Behning and Sauer 2005; Meier 2006). Across Europe, the strategy tends to be

primarily employed in policy fields where additional resources and major reorganization can be avoided (Einhorn 2006; Krizsan and Zentai 2006 for Hungary; Guadagnini and Dona 2007 for Italy; Sauer 2007 for Austria; Lang 2007 for Germany). In Northern and Western Europe, some governments downsize the transformative potential of gender mainstreaming by draining governance bodies of gender expertise (e.g., Outshoorn and Oldersma 2007 for the Netherlands) or avoiding additional spending (Holli and Kantola 2007 for Finland).

European Women's NGOs and their networks are implicated in gender mainstreaming in several ways. One of the founding documents of the European gender mainstreaming strategy, the previously cited 1998 report by the Council of Europe, explicitly relates gender mainstreaming to a shift in actors, "passing matters related to gender equality from the hands of the specialists of the equality units to a greater number of people, including external actors" (Verloo 2005, 351). Women's NGOs are conceptualized as one of these external actors, as groups that can help support the strategy with their knowledge and can create political will to keep gender mainstreaming on the public agenda (*ibid.*). Feminist advocates and NGOs are strongly involved in gender mainstreaming policies in Ireland and the UK. In other EU countries, the increase in and range of participating actors is for the most part limited to a broadening of institutional actor cooperation (Clavero et al. 2004). Yet, even among broader institutional cooperations, there is a need to bring in outside expertise; expertise which is often being provided by TAN members (GMEI—Gender Mainstreaming Experts International 2008). Thus, European women's NGOs and their networks are called upon to use their knowledge and monitoring capacity institutionally and publicly. They are seen as actors with responsibility for contributing to public debates because they have first hand and comparative insight into the impact that the strategy has had on the national level (Mazey 2002).

Beyond being outside experts that offer training and publicly monitor gender mainstreaming, some women's NGOs are more directly involved in implementing the strategy by being partners in EU-funded programs. Gender mainstreaming is a requirement in all programs of the European Structural Funds, and cooperation of national or regional governance bodies with civil society actors is one of the programs' pillars (Braithwaite 2000). In the recent round of EQUAL, a program initiative that specifically operates on the premises of social inclusion, transnationality, empowerment and with a bottom up approach, about 2000 NGOs across the EU participated with projects, many of them women's NGOs (EAPN 2007).

EQUAL, while being a driving force for gender mainstreaming, has also encouraged and strengthened partnerships with women's NGOs in its development partnerships (EQUAL 2005; EQUAL-ETG 2005). Feminist structures and organizations are affected by gender mainstreaming because showing a strong mainstreaming component increases funding chances (Kuhl 2003). Some women's NGOs thus seem well positioned to contribute to and analyze implementation from within partnerships. In summary, women's NGOs across Europe are facing demands to monitor gender mainstreaming, to train gender experts, and to practice and implement it when being part of EU funded projects.

Different "hats" that women's NGOs wear in regard to gender mainstreaming might, however, also present challenges. Engaging in and at the same time monitoring implementation points to a potential conflict of interest; so does receiving funds for building institutional expertise while doing public advocacy that might challenge institutional commitment. How do European women's NGOs navigate these different identities and differing demands? A widely used strategy to deflect constraints in voice of individual NGOs is to make use of *transnational* organizational leverage. Women's TANs are well positioned to absorb conflicts of interests of their members and politicize issues that might be "too close to home" for some NGOs. We can assume there to be reasonable incentive to use transnational NGO networking capacity to build expertise, monitor, and practice advocacy regarding gender mainstreaming. The question that I pose in this next section is: How do European transnational women's networks try to influence gender mainstreaming?

Five European Women's TANs and Gender Mainstreaming

Five TAN were selected for this study. Selection criteria included (i) representation of a broad range of policy arenas, (ii) size of membership base, and (iii) an explicit gender equality agenda. The largest and institutionally most influential women's TANs in Europe is EWL, a network of about 4,000 women's NGOs in EU member states (EWL 2005). Initiated as an umbrella organization by EU institutions in 1990 to foster coordination of women's civic groups, EWL works on a broad range of issues regarding women's equality. It has run campaigns for the inclusion of gender equality in the Treaty of Amsterdam and for the consideration of an equality agenda in the Constitutional process (EWL 2005; Helfferich and Kolb 2001). EWL is considered to be the women's network with the closest ties to EU institutions as well as to other civil society organizations and networks in Brussels. The second network we look at is

KARAT—a regional coalition of about sixty-five women’s NGOs in Central and Eastern Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) that was formed in the aftermath of the Beijing 1995 conference as a response to the perceived invisibility of these regions and today is their prime women’s representative on UN and EU platforms (Aigner 2006; Fuchs 2006). *WAVE* (Women Against Violence Europe) is a Vienna-based network of about 4,000 women’s NGOs across Europe that mobilizes and coordinates activities to strengthen human rights of women and children and to combat violence. Its 81 focal points are hubs for disseminating information and for coordinating advocacy with the Vienna office. *WECF* (Women in Europe for our Common Future) is a network of about eighty women’s environmental organizations in thirty-three countries of Europe and Central Asia. It focuses on gender-sensitive environmental policy and fosters cooperation among European-level environmental NGOs with an equality focus. *WIDE* (Women in Development Europe) dates back to 1985 and is an alliance of developmental NGOs that monitors economic and developmental policies and practices on the EU level. *WIDE* consists of thirteen regional platforms that function as hubs for national and regional NGOs. All five networks exist independently. Even though *EWL* is an umbrella organization, none of the four other networks is an *EWL* member. Whereas *EWL* is tapping into the membership pools of large national umbrella organizations such as the Women’s Council in Denmark or the German Women’s Council, three networks (*WAVE*, *WECF*, and *WIDE*) are policy-based alliances and one, *KARAT*, is a geographically focused network. Only *EWL* and *WIDE* have Brussels offices. Representatives of the other networks spend a considerable amount of time traveling to meetings in Brussels, but do not have the resources for a constant presence in the EU “capital” (*KARAT* 2008; *WAVE* 2005). Cooperation between the networks is project driven and not common. The only continuing cooperation exists between *KARAT* and *WIDE*, which in 2004 have joined forces to introduce economic literacy programs in CEE/CIS countries. In 2006, *KARAT* also hosted the *WIDE* Annual Conference in Warsaw, and the two networks plan future projects together (*KARAT* 2008) (table 1).

Probing the networks’ influence in the EU gender mainstreaming debate, I have compiled three sets of data: The first set consists of interviews with directors/board representatives and members of the networks. The interviews were structured (a) to address the networks’ position on gender mainstreaming with a focus on attempts to influence frames, policies, or practices and (b) to examine the networks’ overall propensity to engage in public advocacy campaigns

Table 1. Transnational Women's Networks in Europe.

	Founded	Mission	Members	Funding	Projects	Strategies
EWL, European Women's Lobby	1990	Fostering coordination of women's NGOs on the EU level	Delegates from 4,000 women's NGOs on national and EU level	Ca. 80% EU, 20% membership fees and other resources	Women's empowerment and gender equality—no feminist rhetoric	Monitoring, networking and institutional lobbying
KARAT, Coalition of CEE/CIS women's NGO's	1995	Network of women in Eastern and Central Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States	Warsaw based association with 65 NGOs and individual members	International and national public authorities and NGOs	Promoting gender equality in CEE/CIS states	Monitoring the implementation of international agreements, lobbying, projects
WAVE, Women Against Violence Europe	1994	Network of women's NGOs combating violence against women/children	4,000 women's NGOs across Europe	International and national public authorities and private donations	Strengthening human rights of women and children, feminist analysis	Information exchange, influence policies, promote feminist analysis

Continued

Table 1. *Continued*

	Founded	Mission	Members	Funding	Projects	Strategies
WECF, Women in Europe for our Common Future	1992	Stimulates cooperation between women in NGOs in environment, health, sustainable development	Network of 80 women environment organizations in 33 European and Central Asian countries	Foundations, private donors and public/institutional sponsors	Gender sensitive environmental policy and gender impact assessments - no feminist rhetoric	Institutional lobbying, networking
WIDE, Network Women in Development Europe	1985	Network of development NGOs, monitors and influences global economic and development policy and practice	National platforms in 9 EU member states, individual members and associations	National governments, foundations, and EU; membership fees of platforms	Promoting gender equality through feminist analysis	Information exchange, networking

including the availability of resources for advocacy. I conducted twelve interviews between 2005 and 2008 at two nodes of the networks: One with representatives of the central network structure and the other with NGO representatives whose organization is a network member. The interviews were initiated by e-mail or phone call to respective TANs and member organizations. These were asked to refer the author to an executive board/executive office member knowledgeable in the area of gender mainstreaming and campaign advocacy. Three interviews were conducted by phone, the others in person in five EU member states. The interviews were between 45 and 120 min long and semi-structured. Eight interviews were taped and transcribed; notes were taken for four interviews.

The second set of data utilizes the networks' web presence to investigate the same two sets of questions. I ask how the networks address the issue of gender mainstreaming in their web sphere and how advocacy campaigns are launched and sustained more generally via the web. This second set of data reflects the fact that the web has developed into a fast and low-cost communication tool for information, networking, and strategic action among civic groups (Castells and Cardoso 2006). As all of our networks span multiple European cultures and languages, their websites serve as a central and widely accessible focal point for joint discursive frames and collective action. Whether and how these networks engage with gender mainstreaming in their most public communication hub provides evidence of priorities, frames, and public outreach. The third set of data consists of network maps generated by the "issuecrawler" software developed by Richard Rogers from the University of Amsterdam. Issuecrawlers map the links among websites and thus provide heuristic evidence of networking activities such as joint agendas, projects, or mere informational exchange relationships. By using this network tool, we can assess relative networking strength and gauge the capacity to engage in joint public advocacy.

Network Representatives on Gender Mainstreaming

Interviews with network representatives highlighted critical positions on gender mainstreaming, maybe best reflected in the contention that "it's something that seems quite positive, but that can work against women" (WECF 2005; WIDE 2007b). Concerns crystallized around three themes: (a) Network representatives felt that gender mainstreaming is being increasingly functionalized on EU stages to bypass concerns regarding lingering inequalities of women; (b) They argued that gender mainstreaming reduces a radical democratization agenda to one of economic questions within

an “added value” discourse, and (c) they contended that mainstreaming “buries women’s issues in the state” (EWL 2005) by infusing state and supra-state actions with the language of gender conscious behavior while neglecting communication and dissemination into civil society.

Functional reduction. The functional approach to gender mainstreaming turns the gender equality agenda into a merely “technical” matter (WIDE 2007b). Gender mainstreaming opens the door to some sort of functional checkbox equality in which projects are being measured by how well they serve both sexes. At times it is employed to include men specifically into program activities and thus dilutes the focus on women’s empowerment: “In the practical program implementation we had a lot of fights (with EU agencies), because they claimed that now that we use gender mainstreaming we have to find ways to integrate men into projects” (EWL 2005). At other times, it is used to marginalize or exclude more women-centered approaches to gender equality. “The fact that gender mainstreaming is a strategy that is integrated into the Amsterdam Treaty as well as into national legislation has made it easier to operate with the term. The problem is that we always have to add: “But this does not replace women’s empowerment activities” (WECF 2005). Whereas gender mainstreaming now serves as a “door opener”, “the flip side of the medal is that advocating affirmative action programs for women now closes every door. We have no chance with this term anymore, we in fact *have* to use the language of gender mainstreaming” (emphasis of speaker). “If one refers to traditional women’s equality language, one encounters a lot of rejection, not from all, but from many (within the EU). One hits walls immediately now” (WECF 2005).

The fact that the majority of programs now have a gender mainstreaming component underscores the problem. It tends in effect to produce a “writing out” (Jenson 2008) of women’s policies from public documents and programs. “It means that everybody uses the terms (gender mainstreaming and women’s policies) synonymously” (WECF 2005). “Gender mainstreaming has been invented for us in order not to have to use the word ‘women’ anymore”, argues an EWL representative (EWL 2005). “The gender mainstreaming frame glosses over existing inequalities” (WAVE 2005). “If women’s equality is mentioned, that is good. But with gender mainstreaming, women’s issues are omitted” (KARAT 2005). “It is somehow not demanding a deep reflection on discrimination” (WIDE 2007a). “What is being lost (with the gender mainstreaming frame) is that we focus on prevention of new inequalities” (EWL 2005).

The networks in question thus are apprehensive about a tendency to functionally reduce gender mainstreaming to either always include men or sideline an explicit women's equality agenda, an effect which they argue ultimately results in people losing sight of existing inequalities. In effect, these networks use the term cautiously, realizing that at any given point in negotiations with political institutions they have to be prepared to add layers of interpretation. The only positive effect mentioned is the creation of a new labor market segment for gender experts. "As an effect of gender mainstreaming, women from our network can utilize their knowledge as gender experts and trainers" (WAVE 2005).

Economic reduction. A WECF representative points to other possibly problematic effects of gender mainstreaming strategies by arguing: "Gender mainstreaming...invites reactions that I find strange. The reactions are that we have to prove consistently that gender mainstreaming produces some added value for politics. This is an argument that many women and gender experts have signed on to – and I find this problematic. Maybe we can measure political improvements in some individual cases, but why should adding a gender perspective for example improve environmental policies or climate protection? I think that this is one of the traps that gender mainstreaming has produced" (WECF 2005). What this spokeswoman indicates is that the gender mainstreaming discourse might feed well into the larger economic turn in policy evaluation: If measured evidence for the added value of including gender is demanded, then arguments about the basic democratic virtues of descriptive representation and the need for a radical restructuring of masculinist governance get sidelined. Gender mainstreaming thus inadvertently might serve to reframe the "traditional" emancipatory focus of the second wave women's movements by inviting "added value" arguments.

Bureaucratic reduction. A third set of reservations that the network representatives voiced concerns explicitly top-down implementation of gender equality that the mainstreaming strategy entails. Networks take issue with the state-centered debates that the strategy produces and the lack of substantive input that it invites from civil society actors. As a result, women's networks observe increasing resistance to utilize the strategy. The WECF representative argues that "I see an emerging wave of radicalization among the women's organizations that have supported gender mainstreaming – that are also financed to support it, like WECF – but that raise the question frequently: Is this really what we wanted? Don't we have to adapt too

much within the frame of gender mainstreaming? Because more progressive positions are simply not listened to anymore, and that in turn produces separation, because those that are too radical in their positions are not listened to at all anymore – only those that swim on the wave of gender mainstreaming. And that is in part buried in the concept itself, that its critical edges are ground down...” (WECF 2005). While some governance institutions reduce mainstreaming to deradicalize feminist demands, other bureaucracies are aloof or ignorant. “In the beginning we were very enthusiastic. But the problem is that it (gender mainstreaming) is completely misunderstood on the national level. Governments are not interested” (KARAT 2005). Adaptation to state and supra-state EU level prerogatives organized around “femocratic” goals turns the strategy into a questionable bureaucratic exercise for TANs in their dealings with state institutions.

In summary, the interviews suggest that European women’s TANs have reason to be critical of gender mainstreaming. The strategy does not seem to provide an adequate set of tools for their gender equality work. The main constraints that the interviewees observed are the functional, economic, and bureaucratic reduction of a feminist equality agenda. Some articulate dissatisfaction with the strategy as a top down set of tools, others prioritize the lack of definitional clarity and their inability to communicate the strategy to broader public constituencies. In effect, the policy itself is considered to be a potential liability if not always combined in a two-tier system with specific women’s equality measures.

Networks’ Web-based Engagement with Gender Mainstreaming

Generating public discussion is perceived to be one of the central goals of TANs (Keck and Sikkink 1998, 19). Thus, we would assume the criticism of gender mainstreaming to be reflected in the public presentation of the networks. The web is considered to be the most important networking and mobilization arena for transnational alliances (Bennett 2004). It allows not just for the horizontal and fast dissemination of information, but offers the potential for interactive opinion formation as well as for the low-cost mobilization of voice and for campaigning. The following section examines how networks engage with the strategy publicly by analyzing web-based data on gender mainstreaming. We have examined networks’ engagement with the gender mainstreaming strategy through an analysis of web content between March and April 2006. All websites were coded three levels deep for any mention of gender

mainstreaming.¹ In a second step we used content analysis to assess informative, positive, and negative framing of the strategy.

The central finding of the content analysis is that in their official presentation, the five women's networks overwhelmingly do neither use nor address gender mainstreaming and instead employ the traditional frame of gender equality. Only two of the five networks use gender mainstreaming at all within the analyzed three level depths of web content. On the first level, the respective networks' entry sites, no website mentions gender mainstreaming. On the second level, which comprises sixty-four pages taken all networks together, we find five references to gender mainstreaming, of which four are informative and one is critical. On the third level, out of altogether 236 pages, sixteen references to mainstreaming appear. Of all references on the third level, five are informative, ten affirmative, and one takes a critical stance on gender mainstreaming (table 2).

The East European KARAT coalition exposes by far the most active engagement with gender mainstreaming, with two references on the second level and nine on the third level. Seven of these references assess gender mainstreaming positively, two are informative, and none are critical of the strategy. Two organizations, WAVE and EWL, do not mention gender mainstreaming at all on either of the analyzed three website levels. The only network that is critical of the strategy on the analyzed three depth levels is WIDE. On the third level of its websphere, we find a summary of gender mainstreaming in development and trade policies and practices of three EU member countries (Great Britain, Belgium, and Austria) that articulates in detail how "gender mainstreaming policies evaporate in the move from policy to practice" (WIDE 2004). This WIDE assessment reflects its critical position in interviews, but does not actively address the question of political voice and agency.

Table 2. Referencing Gender Mainstreaming on Websites of Transnational Women's Networks (access March 2006).

	1st level, 5 pages	2nd level 64 pages	3rd level 236 pages	No reference— all levels
EWL	No	No	No	38
KARAT	No	2 (I)	9 (7 = A; 2 = I)	92
WAVE	No	No	No	29
WECF	No	No	2 (I)	99
WIDE	No	3 (2 = I, 1 = C)	5 (1 = I; 3 = A; 1 = C)	16

I, informative referencing; A, affirmative referencing; C, critical referencing.

In summary, the TANs overwhelmingly use alternative frames and appear to either ignore or subvert the gender mainstreaming language. This reluctance to actively engage with the central EU equality strategy is particularly glaring in the case of EWL. The Women's Lobby was established with the task to serve as a link between the women's civic sector and the institutions of the EU. Sonia Mazey argued in 2002 that "mainstreaming places new demands upon the limited resources of the E.W.L. and raises difficult strategic issues" (Mazey 2002, 228), pointing to the central position that EWL holds in regard to disseminating the concept and monitoring the strategy. Yet, empirical evidence from its websphere suggests that EWL four years later has publicly sidelined the issue: It engages with gender mainstreaming only on the fourth and fifth levels of its website. The first reference is a position paper from 2002, analyzing the implementation of gender mainstreaming in the programs of the European Structural Fund (EWL 2002). In this paper, the EWL criticizes that gender mainstreaming requirements have not trickled down from the EU level into national program building. The authors detect some of the most significant shortcomings of the implementation in the distribution policies of the European Structural Fund. The problems with the strategy are framed in terms of its definitional weakness—a weakness that in turn leads to a massive lack of clarity in implementation. The second critical assessment of the mainstreaming strategy by the EWL can be found in its Ten Year Review of the Beijing Platform of Action from 2004. Similar to Women in Development Europe, the Women's Lobby observes "mixed results in relation to gender mainstreaming". Acknowledging that the commitment to mainstreaming is voiced in many important EU policy documents, EWL finds the strategy not properly integrated into most policy measures and criticizes that "in general, too little attention was paid to the transformative nature of gender mainstreaming." Moreover, the network points to a lack of monitoring, highlighted by the absence of systematic gender impact assessments. "In all gender mainstreaming policies and initiatives, it is important to have less illusive language and more concrete timeframes, budgets, objectives and monitoring tools in place" (EWL 2004). Even though these are substantial points of criticism, their place in EWL's websphere is quite marginal. Placing an issue on the fourth depth level will not command the attention of site visitors to the degree necessary to spread a viral message throughout the network and organize public voice.

Why does none of the networks use their capacity to initiate a debate around the EU's dominant gender equality strategy? The interviewees all share a pragmatic sentiment: They seem to have

learned to work around gender mainstreaming. The EWL spokeswoman explains “We just don’t use the expression ‘gender mainstreaming’ without also using ‘specifically targeted programs’ for women – it is like automated thinking by a computer” (EWL 2007). In effect, the web analysis exposes less of a coupling and instead more of an abandonment of the term gender mainstreaming. Representatives from the other networks share this insistence on a more viable counterframe that focuses on women’s equality measures. We might interpret the emphasis on women’s equality language as an implicit attempt to reframe the debate. Yet, this does not explain the lack of an orchestrated and prominently placed public debate about a strategy that seems to harbor much controversy. Evidence from the examined data suggests a two-tiered answer. The first tier, discussed in the following section, examines networks’ internal lack of focus on and capacity for public advocacy. Institutional advocacy absorbs much labor, possibly at the expense of broader public outreach and advocacy. The second tier addresses a central condition for women’s networks’ ability to pressure for broader policy changes beyond their specific issue focus: Their ability to network not just internally, but *among* each other. I will return to this point in the last section of the article.

Public Advocacy: Mobilizing Ones Own Constituency

Public advocacy takes place if issues are brought to the attention of broader constituencies whose support is being solicited. Advocacy frames can be disseminated directly by the network or via its member organizations, tools being as diverse as getting media exposure, engaging in viral campaigns or in other protest activities. Yet even mobilizing one’s own issue network is a resource and time intensive endeavor. In 2002, Women in Europe for a Common Future formed an intra-network group for gender mainstreaming. But the WECF person who chairs this group cautions expectations regarding its mobilization potential. It was formed, she reports, with funding from the EU. It meets once a year and provides an informational hub for gender mainstreaming issues. Tasks like policy evaluation and extended public advocacy would stretch its possibilities. “Meeting once a year is too little to really work on questions like ‘what is gender mainstreaming, what does it mean for our work and what kind of instruments are there around?’” (WECF 2005).

In general, network success seems to depend less on public mobilization and more on traditional lobbying strategies like finding the right door opener to EU institutional settings. One could argue that in the “tough competition” for access to EU units and for finances

(KARAT 2005), the mobilization of feminist publics might be helpful. However, as several interviewees pointed out, having an office in Brussels is more effective than activating broader constituencies. Limited resources require a decision between a “lobby focus” and “public outreach” that networks tend to answer in favor of the former (WIDE 2007a,b).

An additional problem seems to present itself regarding the subjects of possible mobilization. One interviewee pointedly asked “Who are these publics, anyway?” – voicing skepticism regarding the potential for women’s mobilization in the aftermath of the turn to identity politics (EWL 2007). A WIDE representative echoed this observation by arguing that the network “doesn’t really have the kind of membership it can mobilize” but added “I think that’s something we should certainly build, more capacity to actually get your voice out there and be heard” (WIDE 2007b). Disengagement with broader feminist publics and reluctance to call on members for public advocacy are known features of the NGOization of women’s movements (Lang 2000). They might also apply to TANs.

An increasingly important indicator for public outreach and advocacy in transnational networks is web presence. It is this relatively low-cost, but high profile, tool that helps interested citizens “find” issues and get connected to causes. Networks are aware of the power of the web and use it to mobilize (Bimber 2003). New technologies such as the internet “reduce the costs of participating in transnational networks” (Della Porta and Tarrow 2004, 12). People consult websites if they are contemplating joining a network or a specific campaign. Journalists who research issues and activities turn to web-based information from NGOs and their interlinked partners. And governments get clues about civic activism from the web (Rogers 2004). We can therefore consider the internet presentation of these networks to be a crucial element of their political advocacy (table 3).

Four of the networks, WECF, WAVE, EWL, and KARAT, provide links to their local and regional membership associations, but they do not particularly showcase the aggregated weight of member NGOs and individual members. Whereas in 2005/6 four TANs exhibit a strong EU lobby focus and three a regional advocacy focus, only two of the networks—KARAT and WAVE—combine institutional EU lobbying with a regional or local advocacy focus. EWL networks on some policy matters between the supranational and the national level and is asking for direct member input in its General Assemblies. Yet there is no evidence of further outreach down from the national umbrella members to mobilize regional constituencies. Only two networks, EWL and WAVE, had sites explicitly developed

Table 3. European Transnational Women's Networks: Information and Advocacy Focus (access November 2005 and September 2006).

	Links to local/ regional membership associations	EU lobby focus	Regional advocacy focus	Public campaign/ media focus	Internet- based campaigns
EWL	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No
KARAT	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No
WAVE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
WECF	Yes	No	Yes	No	No
WIDE	No	Yes	No	No	No

to get media attention for campaigns. On several occasions, EWL asked visitors to its site to write letters to members of Parliament or the Commission or to pressure national politicians regarding a specific gender issue. In most cases, letter templates were provided or postcards had been designed for printout. At the time, none of the networks had any internet-based campaign activity online, such as visitors being able to join a petition or be connected to groups in their vicinity for mobilization activities. Overall, the five networks seem to be not making full use of the communication tools that networks in other policy arenas have professionalized in recent years (Bennett 2003; Klein 1999).

The reasons cited in interviews for these thin efforts to practice broader public outreach echo the theme of resource poverty. Yet while even internet-based activities such as member surveys, signature campaigns, or providing "activist" kits require some staff and financial means, resources cannot fully explain the absence of low-cost web-based tools for mobilization. Linking to campaigns of member NGOs, moderating issue-specific blogs or organizing web-based automated campaigns would not be very costly. An additional explanation might be that public advocacy can be relatively low-cost, but also carries a potentially high risk. Institutional and public advocacy are not always compatible. Public advocacy bears the risk of virally spiraling out of control or of becoming too confrontational. Institutional advocacy is more manageable. A WIDE representative suggests that "the debate about inside/outside is always going on. Some people think, we, including me here, spend too much time engaging policy makers, sitting down at the table, talking to them. Other people are kind of living in an alternative universe and they're not engaging at all (institutionally, S.L.), so what impact do they have? So you need both if you're going to keep your

autonomy, keep your independent voice, but you must strategically engage” (WIDE 2007b).

Building Network Capacity across Networks

One of the strategies to generate public power and visibility is to form alliances across networks. The final section of this article addresses whether European transnational women’s networks employ this strategy and to what effect. Pudrovska and Ferree (2004) have shown that the EWL is considerably less networked with other transnational women’s networks than others are. The authors attribute this lack of virtual global networking to the EWL’s “intra-EU focus” (Pudrovska and Ferree 2004, 2). However, the present study provides evidence that even *within* the EU, the EWL does not network extensively, a finding that stays consistent for four out of the five networks studied in this context, with the exception of KARAT.

The following network maps were generated with assistance of the *issuecrawler*, a software that allows us to visualize web-based networking among groups, organizations, and institutions (at <http://www.govcom.org>). The crawls pick up links between actors and can be manipulated as to (a) the depth of sites within the web presence of an organization, (b) the number of starting points, that is site origins, and (c) the iterations, that is how far the network analysis stretches into a given network sphere. Actors appear on the network map if they are co-linked to, that is if at least two other actors in the network sphere link to it. Network diagrams also show the direction of main linkages (the arrows), the relative strength of a linked actor (size of dot) as well as its broadly defined institutional form (for example URL suffixes such as .gov, .org, or national suffixes in different colors). The destination URL marks the actor that is at the center of linkages and we see who links to it and who it links to.

Our initial attempts to correlate two networks respectively and obtain network maps had only limited success. The only networks rendered were between KARAT and WIDE, KARAT and EWL, and KARAT and WECF. All other correlated websites did not show networks within the two depth level, indicating that they are not actively connecting to other networks on their websites, and that other networks do not connect to them (table 4).

When we put all five networks as starting points into a crawl of two depth levels and two iterations, the resulting thin network map renders a depiction of WECF Germany networking with the transnational WECF network and KARAT networking with WIDE (eurosur.org). The fact that EWL (womenlobby.org) is not present on this

Table 4. Networking among Networks.

	EWL	KARAT	WAVE	WECF	WIDE
EWL	n/a	Network	No network	No network	No network
KARAT	Network	n/a	No network	Network	Network
WAVE	No network	No network	n/a	No network	No network
WECF	No network	Network	No network	n/a	No network
WIDE	No network	Network	No network	No network	n/a

map indicates that it has much fewer overall links than WECF and KARAT. EWL might link out, but only very few actors link back to it (figure 1).

This, to remind ourselves, does not imply that these networks do not network at all *within* their respective issue arenas; in fact we find somewhat stronger networking attempts among member NGO within a network. An example is WECF and all its links that

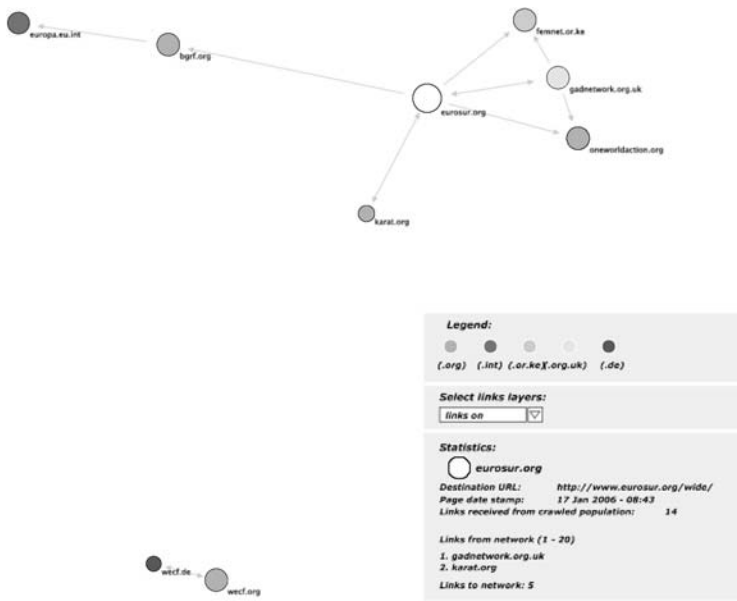


Figure 1. KARAT-WAVE-WIDE-EWL-WECF-ON-PG-2-2. The shades of grey of the dots refer to different institutional domains of websites, such as “gov”, “org” etc. For a more detailed and color-coded view of this and the following two figures, please consult the online version of this article at <http://sp.oxfordjournals.org/>.

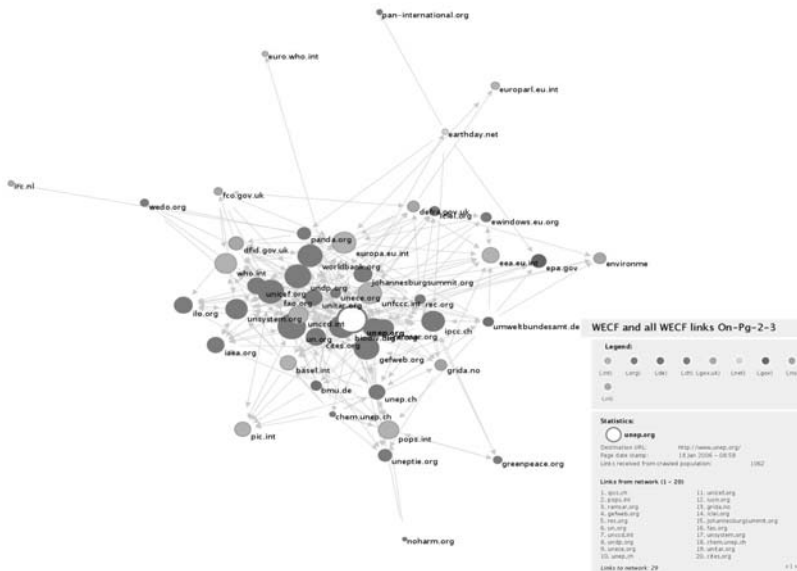


Figure 2. WECF and all links-ON-PG-2-3.

extend into a rather strong network of ecologically oriented actors (figure 2).

The fact that WECF as the starting point itself disappears from these network linkages suggests that even though it is reaching out, the other actors are not linking back much to WECF. A similar picture is generated when we crawl EWL and its internal links, while KARAT's networks tend to be stronger with the organization receiving many more co-links and therefore staying present in the networks that it initiates.

Figure 3 captures the centrality of issue focus for European women's networks that comes in part at the expense of networking among each other. The example here maps network activities of EWL and WECF, going three levels deep into their respective webspheres.

In this map, EWL stays somewhat on the margin of the NGO networks it relates to, while WECF reaches out into two separate networks: the environmental network as well as UN-focused organizations. Staying on the margins, as EWL does, indicates that it is less present in network traffic than more centrally clustered organizations. The arrows point to a bias of linkages to EWL that it does not return. WECF clearly is more interested in its issue related transnational connections than in other European women's networks.

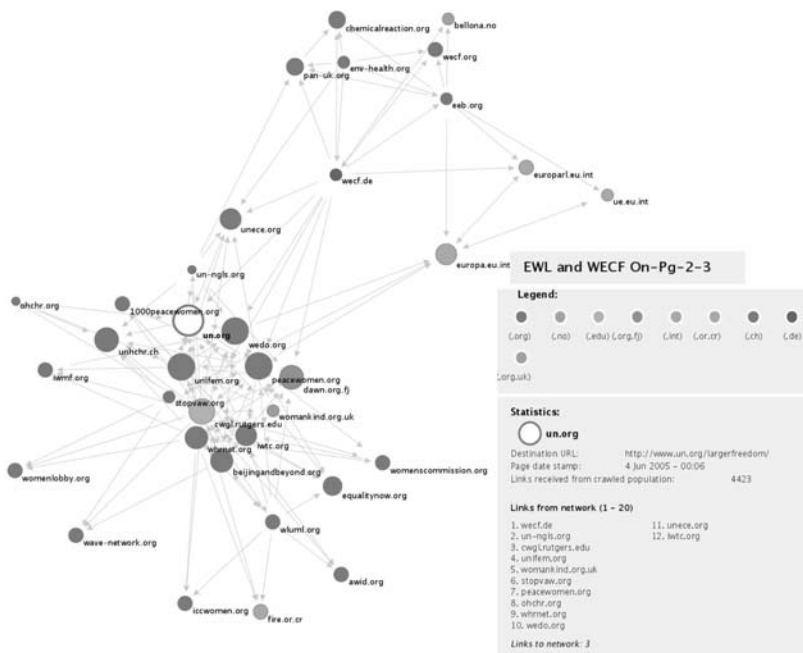


Figure 3. EWL and WECF-ON-PG-2-3.

In summary, the issuecrawler maps visualize a lack of communication and interaction among our five transnational women's networks, a communication that would be key to joint policy interventions of overarching concern such as gender mainstreaming, but also key to the initiation of broader public outreach and activism for their respective agendas. The fact that they so rarely link to each other underscores the interview positions that cooperation among networks is for the most part limited and systematically only sought by WIDE and KARAT. Relating the lack of networking back to gender mainstreaming, a representative of WECF argues that what is missing is a "joint evaluation and monitoring by women's networks that asks: how does it (gender mainstreaming) affect networks and how can networks affect the gender mainstreaming strategy – that has not happened so far" (WECF 2005). Both a KARAT and a WECF representative point to EWL as being best positioned to organize public voice in regard to the strategy (KARAT 2008; WECF 2005). However, EWL's organizational structure is based on national coordination platforms and thus privileges vertical integration of members over horizontal networking with issue-specific women's TANs. Overall, the issuecrawler evidence suggests that at

this point only limited networking capacity exists for joint evaluation and mobilization for women's issues among European women's TANs.

Conclusion

This article has examined European women's TANs influence on the gender mainstreaming debate in the context of their capacity for public advocacy and networking. If a central goal for TANs is generating public discussion about gender equality strategies, we would assume to find attempts to shape the gender mainstreaming debate. We have established that the five TANs included in this case study take issue with the mainstreaming strategy. Yet, they tend to forgo public debate and instead attempt to tacitly reframe discourse by employing strong women's equality language.

What guides the networks' decisions to prioritize counterframing instead of publicly engaging in debate on mainstreaming seem to be material as well as institutional rationales. Influence depends to a large degree on internal organizational capacity (Della Porta and Tarrow 2004), and in turn the kinds of internal capacities that a network develops will inform how it will try to influence an issue. In the case of our networks, internal capacity is focused on the gendering of specific issue arenas such as development, the environment, or economic literacy. Much labor goes into developing specialized expertise. Broader questions about overall EU gender equality strategies necessarily take backstage. Moreover, capacity needs to be built to secure network infrastructure and its personnel. Grant writing, pursuing project cooperations, and managing human resources are cited by all networks as central to survival and, depending on the network, occupy up to 60 percent of work time. Lack of resources for mobilization and advocacy seems to be a possible fallout from this precarious institutionalization of women's TANs.

Yet, resources are not the only rationale at work. The networks have developed expertise in institutional advocacy and, as some interviewees indicate, might have done so at the expense of public outreach (KARAT 2008; WIDE 2007b). We have shown that public campaign activities even in their low-cost web-based form are not common, and if they happen, they are more geared towards institutional actors than towards grassroots organizing or towards generating sustainable feminist publics. The overall organizational "mindset" of our TANs tends to be oriented towards institutional advocacy. Moreover, networking among networks as a means to enhance public visibility and leverage is not commonly practiced, with the exception of WIDE and KARAT.

Women's strategic choices are rooted in the kinds of institutional settings and practices they confront (Ferree and Mueller 2003). The EU has provided considerable openings for civil society actors, and women's TANs have become experienced institutional advocates in Brussels. Advances in gender equality have largely been dependent on the creation of "velvet triangles" (Woodward 2004), that is on cooperation of political institutions, femocrats within institutions, and feminist activists in civil society. Women's TANs as organizations of feminist activists in Europe navigate partnerships in these velvet triangles with care and considerable impact in their respective issue arenas. If this study finds public outreach strategies that would mobilize broader constituencies and network linkages that could advance overarching women's policy goals to be less developed, this does not imply lack of policy success. But it suggests that on matters of overall importance in European gender governance, such as the future of the gender mainstreaming strategy or the mission of the newly founded Gender Institute, women's TANs at this point in time lack the influence they should have.

NOTES

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1. The levels refer to (a) the initial website of the main URL, (b) all sites that are clickable from the initial URL, (c) all sites that are clickable from this second set of sites. We assume that importance of an issue will be reflected by posting it on these first three levels of a site as opposed to deeper within the websphere of a TAN.

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