

Does Federalism Impact Gender Architectures? The Case of Women's Policy Agencies in Germany and Austria

Sabine Lang* and Birgit Sauer†

*University of Washington; salang@u.washington.edu

†University of Vienna; birgit.sauer@univie.ac.at

This article investigates how strong German and weak Austrian cooperative federalism affect women's policy machineries. We find that it is the federal organization of both polities that has posited engrained advantages for the establishment and the sustainability of women's policy agencies (WPA). We also find that center/left parties are crucial for sustaining and advancing the role of WPA. However, during economic crises, we see that the women's policy infrastructure in the strong federal state (Germany) was downsized while Austria's national social democratic WPA protects subnational institutions.

Germany and Austria have long been considered conservative and male-breadwinner welfare states (Ostner and Lewis 1995; Michel and Mahon 2002). Throughout the latter half of the twentieth century, both were laggards in Western Europe in promoting labor market participation by women, reproducing a typical male breadwinner family and a stay-at-home or part-time employed mother. Therefore, the fact that both countries have substantial women's policy infrastructures seems counterintuitive. Women's policy agencies (WPA), defined as "any structure established by government with its main purpose being the betterment of women's social status" (McBride Stetson and Mazur 1995, 3) developed from the local to the national level, in effect utilizing the "politics of scale" to promote gender policy innovation (i.e., Guenther 2006; Mahon 2006; MacRae 2010). By all accounts, Germany has the most developed network of WPA in Europe, with more than 1,900 equality offices on the local level alone (BMFSFJ 2008) and additional WPA units on the Länder and the federal level. Austria's WPA structure, while somewhat less ubiquitous, also features a stable network of equality-oriented agencies that has gained steady influence, with gender budgeting constitutionally required on all by 2013. Thus, while in both countries women remained socially and economically disadvantaged for much of the twentieth century, demands to institutionalize a gender equality infrastructure resulted in

more substantive action than in other European countries. In this article, we explore the hypothesis that it is the *federal* organization of both polities that resulted in the establishment and sustainability of these extensive WPA networks. However, they were not primarily the result of civic mobilization. Instead, in both federalist systems, WPA gained salience through party efforts on multiple levels to create offices to promote women, combat discrimination, and mainstream gender by inserting it into general policy making. Our main question is: To what degree has the federal architecture contributed to the success WPA, and in what ways might federal reform debates or actual changes in the structure of federal arrangements impact WPA? Success refers to the extent to which WPA are institutionalized; governments deciding to expend resources to create and sustain institutional agencies that explicitly address the advancement of women. While we acknowledge that formal institutionalization does not guarantee policy success, it is a central precondition for making gender inequality visible and signaling its importance throughout government and to society at large.

Germany and Austria are considered poster children of unitary and cooperative federalism in the European Union. Both have multiparty systems within rather homogeneous societies. Both are “party-democracies” in which political decision making, on all levels, is fueled by party mobilization and organization, thus inviting the labels “party federalism” or “party-federal-state” (von Beyme 2007; Decker 2011; Gabriel 1989). Austria and Germany share central features of federalism, but are different in size: Austria has a tenth of the population of Germany; and organization: Austria has nine federal states (Länder), Germany has sixteen Länder, of which five were recreated after unification in 1990. Cultural cleavages are stronger in Germany, amplified by the division between the Western and the new Eastern Länder. In terms of religion, Austria is much more homogenous with 90 percent Catholics (Fallend 2006, 1026). In Germany, by contrast, Protestants, Catholics, and agnostics each make up roughly 32 percent of the population, with about 5 percent Muslims. Austrian federalism, with its smaller scale, has stronger corporatist and informal components, and a tendency towards decision-making by consensus. In general, Austrian federalism is considered weak, a mere constitutional principle, with few policies being decided on the Länder level and less Länder influence on the federal level (Erk 2004, 2008). In both Austria and Germany, the central government collects roughly 60–75 percent of total state revenues. Yet while in Germany central government spending is relatively small (between 30 and 40 percent), in Austria it is much higher (between 45 and 60 percent) (Anderson 2008, 33–34). These differences notwithstanding, the two federalisms have enough common features to warrant analysis as “most similar cases” (Przeworski and Teune 1970) and thus to hold extraneous variance at a minimum. Comparing the gender infrastructure in these similar cooperative and centralized federal states will enable us to highlight the impact of federalist structure on WPA while also

identifying exogenous factors influencing the gender equality agenda, in particular party alignment.

Previous gender research on federalism primarily asked if and under which conditions specific forms of federations favor women's movements' demands. The focus has been on how federal structures influenced "how women's movements organize" (Sawer and Vickers 2010, 3), and utilized different levels of policy making in federations to advance gender policy making and attain gender equality policies (McRae 2010; Chappell 2000). Of particular interest was how "organized women can change or circumvent obstructive federal arrangements" (Vickers 2010, 413). It was established that several "vertical" and "horizontal" conditions seem to build windows of opportunity for movement activism, such as "access to multiple decision-making sites; forum shopping which lets women work around blockage at one governance level and take advantage of an opening at another level; and policy innovations in one jurisdiction which spread to others" (Vickers, Hausman, and Sawer 2010, 229). This article proposes an additional dimension to the study of federalism and gender. We follow Benz (2001, 40) in arguing that comparative federalism research needs to take into account institutional settings. Studies of the "Research Network on Gender, Politics, and the State" (RNGS) found that WPA play an important mediating role in helping women's movement actors bring their frames and ideas into the policy process (Outshoorn and Kantola 2007; McBride and Mazur 2010). Thus, WPA can become allies for women's movement actors in their attempts to gender the policy agenda, policy processes, and policy outcomes. This is particularly relevant in states where policy making involves closed decision making, as is often the case in parliamentary federations, with the effect that "the question of gender impact tends to 'fall off the table'" (Vickers, Hausman, and Sawer 2010, 235). Hence, studying the role of WPA in federal states is an important contribution to gendering studies on federalism (see also Chappell 2002; Meier and Celis 2008; Lang 2010; Celis and Meier 2011; Lang and Sauer 2011).

Utilizing Erk's (2007) guiding questions regarding federalism, this article explores the extent federalism matters for the development of an institutional gender architecture, and to what degree differences in federalism arrangements influence gender equality institutions in Germany and Austria. In particular, we ask how strong German and weak Austrian cooperative federalism shaped women's policy architecture, and how they affect the capacities of WPA. Does the interlocking federalism in Germany provide a better environment for developing a gender equality architecture than the weaker, more centralized informal federalism of Austria? Is informal corporatist federalism in Austria more favorable to stabilizing WPA than the recent turn towards a more competitive federalism in Germany? As institutional change depends on the actors involved in institutions, we look at the capacities and resources of WPA in the field of gender equality

policy. This approach does not make the study of policies less important, but it adds an institutional dimension to the gendering of federalism.

In the article, first, we sketch the main features of German and Austrian federalisms. Then we compare the role of WPA in both countries, specifically similar and different effects of federal architecture. Finally, we discuss the impact of parties and economic imperatives on Länder WPA in both countries. In conclusion, we theorize the scope of explanatory power that our cases can attribute to studies of federalism. To assess WPA characteristics and capacities, we conducted interviews with heads or deputy heads of fourteen of the sixteen Länder women's units in Germany and of all the nine Länder women's units in Austria between December 2010 and March 2011.¹ We also consulted the websites of the Länder WPA, government and WPA reports, as well as existing literature on WPA.

Germany and Austria: Outlines of Strong and Weak Cooperative Federations

Federalism is an engrained part of both polities, allowing for cultural diversity, capacity for innovation, and checks and balances. In West Germany, eleven Länder were reinstated as a central pillar of the post-World War II political architecture to avoid centralization and abuses of power (Gabriel 1989, 66). In East Germany, by contrast, the Länder were dissolved in 1952, but reinstated after unification. The first Austrian constitution of 1920, reinstated in 1945, established a federal model with nine Länder (Grotz and Poier 2010, 245; Erk and Koning 2010, 368). Both countries are not just administrative federations, even though legislation is largely in federal and administration in Länder hands. They are also cooperative federations with a wide array of shared competencies, vertically between the federal and subfederal units, as well as horizontally between the Länder. Vertical cooperation is anchored in both countries' constitutional provision to guarantee uniform or equivalent living conditions among the Länder by redistributing considerable funds from richer to poorer states. German unification strained the unitary fabric of federalism, and exacerbated already existing asymmetries and conflicts, in particular around matters of financial distribution (Benz 1999; Moore, Jacoby, and Gunlicks 2008; Jacoby 2008). However, opinion polls show that citizens see unitarism as an important feature of German and Austrian federalism. Citizens dislike competition among the Länder and encourage politicians to craft unity among the federal subunits (for Germany, see Petersen, Scheller, and Wintermann 2008, 473; for Austria, Bußjäger and Seeber 2010, 41).

Austrian and German federalism is characterized as highly centralized (Erk and Koning 2010, 371). Although both federations promote cooperation and "codetermination," they differ strongly with respect to the influence of the Länder. Germany's strong federalism is fostered by (i) a powerful second

Parliamentary Chamber, the *Bundesrat*, in which the Länder governments are represented proportionally and whose powers include all matters of taxation and central policy initiatives; (ii) a strong intergovernmentalism among the Länder and between Länder and the federal state; (iii) the power of the Länder in administering their own Länder policies, and many federal and European Union (EU) policies. German Länder have autonomy in legislation with respect to important policy fields such as education, environment, and labor markets. Yet the strength of the Länder lies in their institutionalized role as partners and frequently as powerful opponents of the federal government (Hueglin and Fenna 2006, 235–36). This strength is evident in the *Bundesrat*, which votes on roughly half of the legislation originating in the First Chamber, the *Bundestag*, and can initiate laws through the “Second Chamber Initiative.”

By contrast, Austrian Länder have limited autonomy and their influence in the policy-making process via official channels is weak (Fallend 2006, 1024–25; Erk 2004, 5). In Austria’s “weak bicameralism” (Karlhofer 2010, 132), the Second Chamber of Parliament, which represents the Länder (*Bundesrat*) plays only a minor legislative role (Fallend 2006, 1028). Most laws are drafted on the federal level (*Nationalrat*), while the Länder implement and enforce them.² Only in a few policy areas do Austrian Länder have legislative powers, most prominently in community law (*Gemeinderecht*), for example, in regard to public housing, sports, early childhood education, and citizenship. In effect, Austria has been labeled as a “federation without federalism” (Erk 2004).

Austria’s weak federalism is characterized by largely symmetrical, less competitive relations between the Länder (Gamper 2003). In both countries, a wide variety of intergovernmental connections³ organize federal vertical and horizontal interaction. Yet, in particular in Austria, formal intergovernmentalism exists side by side with strong informal negotiations between Bund and Länder and between Länder. Lack of formal legislative Länder power in Austria and reliance on informal ties with the executive led to “unitarization” as well as centralization, which makes Austria one of the most centralized federal states in the world (Bußjäger 2010; Erk 2004). The resulting “executive federalism” appears closed and opaque, with only limited information available to the public, and little public debate or parliamentary deliberation (Fallend 2006, 1035).

Both federations are characterized by a strong “party federalism,” in which parties provide formal as well as “informal connective mechanisms” (Karlhofer 2010, 142). Most policy processes on the Länder and federal levels are dominated by party interests. In Germany, policy cleavages have long been structured by party alignment, but Austria’s federalism is based on stronger corporatism with a long tradition of consensus democracy. Increasingly, though, party differences override corporatism and consensus also in Austria. Today, both federations show increasing

Table 1 German and Austrian federalisms in comparison

	Number of Länder	Federation since	Cooperative federalism	Degree of centralization	Länder initiative	Distribution of power among Länder	Frames of federalism reform	Reform of federalism	Party federalism
Germany	16	1945	Strong	Medium	Medium	Asymmetrical	Strengthening Länder Autonomy	Yes	Strong
Austria	9	1920	Weak	High	Weak	Symmetrical	Abolishing Federalism	No	Strong

competition and conflict between Länder as well as between the national and the Länder level if different parties are in power.

Finally, with respect to attempts to reform federalism, the two countries differ fundamentally. While Germany went through heated reform debates after unification (Gunlicks 2005) and passed two federalism reforms in 2006 and 2009, attempts to reform the federal structure of Austria stalled in 2005 (Grotz and Poier 2010). The debates were quite different in the two countries: in Austria, it centered on abolishing federalism; in Germany, on disentangling joint decision making and the equalization principle. Although Austrian federalism was blamed for being too costly for and ineffective in a small country, the Länder successfully defended their power. In Germany, Länder autonomy was strengthened in areas such as education and environment policies while federal efforts to disentangle the “joint decision trap” (Scharpf 1988) resulted in fewer laws needing Second Chamber approval⁴ (see table 1).

In sum, while both federations share aspects of institutionalized vertical and horizontal cooperation, Austrian Länder are overall weaker in political agenda setting and policy implementation, more consensus focused, and are therefore more prone to follow federal initiative than German Länder with their stronger ability to initiate innovation independently. Both these similarities and differences in federal organization have impacted the institutionalization of WPA.

The Institutionalization of WPA

In both Austria and Germany, the institutionalization of women's policy infrastructure was the result of strategic decisions by women activists to work in and through the state system to achieve gender equality. With respective federal structures providing multiple entry points for women's activism, it is worth exploring on which level, and in which arenas, WPA were pursued. We argue that the specific forms of institutionalization point to differences in power leverage of federal actors in the two states.

WPA—such as Ministries for Women’s Affairs, women’s policy bureaus and equality offices—in both countries were initiated strategically on the level of governance that promised to deliver the most returns, the Länder and local level in Germany, and the national level in Austria. To substantiate this, we explore WPA levels in more depth. WPA in both states have increased their presence at all levels of government—counties, cities, and also in rural areas. In most EU democracies, small-scale and regional WPA have grown substantially over recent decades (Outshoorn and Kantola 2007, 367). Since the city of Cologne established the first WPA (1982), Germany has developed the densest infrastructure of WPA in Europe, perhaps globally. Women’s equality officers at the municipal and regional level have funds to sponsor women’s projects and organize public events and serve as interlocutors with city agencies. Their umbrella organization, the “Federal Association of Local and County Women’s Offices” (BAG—*Bundesarbeitsgemeinschaft kommunaler Frauenbüros*) identifies itself as “a professionalized network of the institutionalized women’s movement”⁵ and it sees its role as lobbying for local women’s interests. It also is a nationally visible and vocal advocate for gender equality. In the 1980s and 1990s, local-level WPA received their own budgets and recognition in most communal constitutions of the German Länder, thus cementing their status as institutionalized equality actors. By contrast, regional and municipal WPA in Austria are not as securely established. Only a few major cities such as Linz, Innsbruck, Salzburg, Graz, and Vienna have WPA⁶ and even fewer, for example the Vienna Municipal Department 57, have independent budgets to fund women’s projects (Considerations 2004, 27).

A second organizational tier in both federations consists of the women’s ministries or women’s units within ministries of the German and Austrian Länder. These units are in charge of implementing state equality laws and working with women’s projects, Länder parliaments, parties, business, and unions to advance equality within the Länder. They communicate with equality officers in public institutions such as the courts, universities, hospitals, and public media as well as with the municipal and regional WPA. All German Länder institutionalized such WPA since the early 1980s, albeit on different levels of Länder executive bureaucracies and with uneven infrastructure and budgets. Moreover, all German Länder have established gender equality laws for the civil service and most have antidiscrimination laws. Through the Second Chamber, they initiated initiatives to change federal law, thus maximizing influence within their federalist position.⁷

WPA in the Austrian Länder and municipal governments are “underdeveloped,” the exception being Vienna (Pelinka and Rosenberger 2007, 227). The nine Austrian provinces established ministries or departments for women’s issues only in the mid-1990s. Moreover, they are responsible for family affairs, social affairs, youth, and other related fields.⁸ Much like social organizations with little formal power, the Austrian Länder WPA have the right to comment on national bills. However, only

the Vienna minister regularly takes advantage of this opportunity to survey gendered impacts of national bills (Interview with representative of MA 57, Vienna, December 2011). Lack of formal influence on the Länder level is thus compensated for with informal attempts to articulate gender impact; yet visibility of Austrian Länder level WPA is low.

The third organizational tier of both countries' federal WPA structures are the federal women's ministries. In Germany, this is the Ministry for Family, Youth, Women and Seniors with a mandate of devising and implementing laws and regulations and initiating model projects advancing the status of women. Representation of women's affairs on the federal level started in 1972 when the Minister for Youth, Family, and Health created a subdivision for women's affairs. In 1986, "women" were added to the ministerial title. In the first decade, this new ministry was shaped by three conservative women's ministers, among them the current Chancellor Angela Merkel between 1991 and 1994. The influence of women's ministers was limited to the right to initiate legislation if cabinet colleagues were not willing to do so; the right to comment on all legislation affecting women; and finally the right to delay legislation that was deemed by the national WPA as having a negative effect on women. The national WPA was completely dependent on the chancellors' and all cabinet colleagues' cooperation and thus during the sixteen-year era of conservative Chancellor Kohl for the most part sidestepped and silent. Since the mid-1990s, left/center social democratic women led the ministry and accelerated policy successes such as a 1996 law to create the right to a child care space for every child three years and older, a 1997 law that banned marital rape, and a law in 2001 that established parental leave. Overall, the German federal WPA is considered weak, leaving most policy initiatives to the Länder level.

In Austria, the federal level WPA historically has taken center stage in gender equality matters. In 1979, the first federal WPA, the State Secretary's office for "general women's issues," was established in the Chancellery.⁹ Johanna Dohnal, a well-known SPÖ feminist with backing from the party's women's organization and with strong ties to the autonomous women's movement, was appointed to head the office. In 1990, negotiations to form a new coalition government included an upgrade, turning the position into a full-fledged Federal Ministry of Women's Affairs. The minister gained a veto in the cabinet of ministers and the right to initiate women's policy, the most prominent being the 1996 law fighting violence against women in the family, which was the first antiviolenze legislation in Europe.

When Austria elected its first postwar Christian-conservative and right-wing populist coalition government between ÖVP and FPÖ in 2000, the federal women's ministry was abolished. A unit for women's affairs became part of the Ministry of Social Security and the Generations, and in 2001 a "men's unit" was added to coordinate and initiate research into men's roles and needs. Only after the 2007

election that restored a grand coalition were the Social Democrats able to negotiate the establishment of a women's ministry under Social Democratic leadership. In the following years, major gender legislation was passed, such as quotas for corporate boards of public enterprises.

Pelinka and Rosenberger (2007, 228) judge the Austrian Länder level more "gender equality resistant."¹⁰ One of several examples is the delay of most Länder in implementing gender equality laws for public service. While the federal level legislated this in 1979, the Länder waited until the mid-1990s (Rosenberger 1997, 692). Only when massive blockages occur at the national level—for example, when the conservative/right-wing coalition government shuts down the women's ministry—do progressive Länder politicians and their WPA step in.¹¹ Thus, although the federalization of WPA in Austria produced a network of agencies that broadened the basis for state-feminist intervention similar to Germany, Austrian WPA interventions are for the most part top-down. With no ability to initiate federal law, the Länder foster a gender equality agenda primarily through formal and informal cooperation, mainly via party channels and by sponsoring women's projects.¹²

The ability of the German Länder to initiate laws has resulted in many highly visible attempts by center/left Land coalitions or parties to legislate on the federal level, such as recent attempts by North Rhine-Westphalia to introduce a quota for women on corporate boards or a 2005 Second Chamber Initiative by the State of Berlin against forced marriage. Even if initiatives by center/left governed Länder do not pass in a center/right federal parliament, they get public attention and create discursive institutional platforms on which to promote gender equality.

In sum: There is evidence that the three-tiered network of WPA in Germany and Austria profited in several respects from cooperative and interwoven federalism. (i) In both countries the institutionalization of WPA on the Länder and municipal levels produced rich and dense gender equality networks. (ii) Federalized WPA provided the political opportunity structure for the creation of locally and regionally based women's projects.¹³ (iii) Blockages on one level of government, as with the conservative parties' rule, to some degree can be offset by engagement of women's actors on another level of government. Yet, empirical evidence also points to differences in WPA influence between the strong cooperative federalism in Germany and the more centralized federalism of Austria. Länder strength matters for WPA, and in particular the German Länder right to initiate legislation as well as their ability to work through established and formalized communication routes with levels above and below. In the absence of such a political opportunity in the Austrian case, it needed the party commitment of a Social Democratic party in national government in the mid-1970s to push a gender equality agenda into the public arena. In effect, the political opportunities that federalist organization creates

for institutionalized WPA are in both cases only valuable if there are parties that utilize them. We will elaborate this point in the final section of this article.

Party Federalism and WPA

Party alignment in both states has had substantial impact on WPA institutionalization. The fact that policy initiatives in both countries are channeled exclusively through parties means that innovation from above and from below has to be launched via parties. WPA are thus in both states best situated and protected if they operate under Social Democratic or Green parties. While this is not a surprising finding, what is noteworthy is how WPA have spread and multiplied even under conservative governments. We attribute this “contagion” effect to the dynamics of party federalism. While party alignment is central, cooperative federalism in both countries has encouraged what DiMaggio and Powell call “upward isomorphism” (DiMaggio and Powell 1991). Assuming that “organizations tend to model themselves after similar organizations in their field that they perceive to be more legitimate or successful” (Szelznick 1996), WPA success on one level of government increased the chances of institutionalization in other horizontal or vertical contexts. In effect, the history of WPA institutionalization in the two federations shows such contagion effects, but in the opposite direction: from the top down in Austria; from the bottom up and horizontally in Germany.

For Austria, we have already established the central role of the Social Democrats in creating a federal women's ministry and using centralized federalism to push a left leaning policy agenda from above. It was the Social Democratic federal government and its WPA that created pressure on the left and right Länder governments to establish gender equality institutions since the late 1980s. Hence, in the 1990s with a time lag, all Länder governments upgraded their WPA infrastructure and established women's ministries. Party alignment, however, remained relevant insofar as leftist Länder governments institutionalized and expanded WPA on a larger scale than conservative Länder. The Austrian model is the city-state of Vienna, known as “red Vienna” since the 1920s for its continuity of social-democratic governments. Vienna established a department for women's issues in 1992, which has been growing since and today has thirty-seven staff members. Also, conservative Austrian Länder were late in implementing a gender equality law for the public service, for instance Lower Austria and Vorarlberg in 1997.

But even under conditions of stronger Länder autonomy and more formalized cooperation in Germany, party alignment mattered. As in Austria, Germany's women's policy architecture is a result of efforts by women activists in and through the Social Democrats and the Greens. Yet in contrast, contagion in Germany happened from below. The left/center Länder coalitions in Germany adopted WPA as early as the beginning 1980s, when conservative Länder still had almost no

women in parliament and the executive.¹⁴ Yet women activists from within the conservative party could point to the success of WPA in other Länder and thereby draw their own government into action. Cooperative federalism thus provided the basis for the institutionalization of Länder WPA with differing economic, social, religious, and ideological backgrounds. It provided for routinized communication venues in which contagion could occur. Länder that had not yet developed a women's policy infrastructure were scrutinized and "shamed" by women activists from within and by other Länder representatives from outside. A similar process could be witnessed during unification and the accession of five new Länder after 1990. All eastern Länder were urged to use administrative guidance and assistance from western Länder in building state bureaucratic infrastructure.¹⁵ The western states delivered the blueprints; the new Länder adopted them with slight variations. Cooperative federalism guaranteed the adoption of the women's policy machinery in the East, and also replicated specific kinds of institutionalization according to party-federalist blueprints.¹⁶

After 1990, all eastern states adopted versions of western states' equality laws and equality machinery. Typically, the type of WPA created in the five new Länder mirrored that of their western partner. Thus, the Land Brandenburg, with its social democratic partner state North Rhine-Westphalia, devised one of the most progressive gender equality laws and a strong WPA. Saxonia, on the other hand, with the rather uncommitted and conservative Land Baden-Württemberg as partner, ended up with a weak legal equality framework and precarious institutionalization of equality offices. At work in this adaptation process were thus federalist cooperations alongside party alignments.

WPA in Times of Fiscal Austerity

As cooperative federalism allows for the upward adaptation of gender issues, it makes these very institutions vulnerable to Länder-specific prioritizing in fiscal crisis. Under fiscal strain and with increasing Länder competition under purely economic imperatives, downward adaptation can take place. This has become dramatically evident in recent years as a weak German economy combined with increasing public debate about a more competitive federalism (Jeffery 2008) put WPA on the defensive.

During the past decade, the women's policy infrastructure in several states has been substantially reduced on the Länder and municipal level. The personnel situation in the Länder women's units reveals that most WPA have been downsized since 2000. However, the WPA in Länder with center/left governments have remained substantially larger than in Länder with center/right governments. This latter observation is independent of Länder size: Berlin for example, a city state with 3.4 million inhabitants, has the largest WPA; Baden-Württemberg, a

traditionally conservative state with 10.7 million inhabitants, has a combined WPA with less than a quarter of Berlin's employees. However, as an interviewee from another city-state, Hamburg, states: "Our department was cut down in the process of budget consolidation since 2009" (Interview/Hamburg/G., January 2011).

As table 2 shows, ten of the fourteen German Länder WPA in which we interviewed staff have seen their budgets for personnel shrink in the past decade. A report on the implementation of Berlin's Equal Opportunity Law in 2004 states that due to budget restrictions, affirmative action proves to be rather difficult (Senatsverwaltung 2004). However, budget cuts are not the only way of disempowering WPA in times of fiscal austerity; it can also happen through the restructuring of the agency by merging women's units into multiservice offices. For instance, in Thuringia, women's issues became part of the Ministry of Employment, Social Affairs and Families. Our interviewee in Saxony-Anhalt stated that the former Department for Women's Affairs was demoted to a unit within the Department of Family, Seniors, Children and Women in 2010 (Interview Saxony-Anhalt/G., January 2011). Similarly, the WPA in Hamburg was merged into an administration of "diversity" unit under a government coalition of conservatives and Greens (Interview Hamburg/G., January 2011).

By contrast, Austria experienced no turn towards stronger competitive federalism and less of a public austerity program. Reviewing the development of resources and personnel in the last year of the ministerial administrations in the Länder, we find party alignment central to advancing WPA (see table 3): Länder with social-democratic governments kept the same staff or even raised WPA resources (e.g., Burgenland, Salzburg, and Vienna), whereas WPA in conservative Länder experienced more cuts in personnel or were only able to secure the status quo (e.g., Lower Austria, Upper Austria, and Tyrol). We could interpret this as an effect of the strength of the Social-Democratic women's organizations on the Länder level; or it could be due to competition between the conservative federal government, which abolished the federal women's ministry at the beginning of the new century, and the left Länder governments, using women friendliness as part of their mobilizing strategy for federal elections. However, the situation is paradoxical: in Carinthia the number of the personnel increased, but their working conditions and salaries worsened (Interview, Carinthia/A, January 2011). The WPA in Vorarlberg had a small increase in personnel, but budget cuts since the year 2010 have made the situation worse (Interview, Vorarlberg/A, January 2011).

In Germany, federalism reform, especially the introduction of competitive elements, as well as budget cuts, led to a downsizing of the Länder women's policy machinery. But despite a discourse of federalism being too costly, budget cuts did not affect the Austrian Länder WPA dramatically. This might be explained by rather poor resources of the women's infrastructure from the start and by the government change on the federal level in 2000: the Social Democratic governments

Table 2 Personnel of German Länder WPA in 2000 and 2011

Länder	Government 2000	Government 2011	Positions in 2011	Comparison of Positions 2000 and 2011
Baden-Württemberg	CDU + FDP	Bündnis 90/Die Grünen + SPD	Four full time Four part time	→
Bavaria	CSU	CSU + FDP	— ^a	—
Berlin	CDU + SPD	SPD + CDU	Thirty-three full time	→
Brandenburg	SPD + CDU	SPD + Die Linken	Fourteen full time	→
Bremen	SPD + CDU	SPD + Bündnis 90/Die Grünen	Ten full time	→
Hamburg	SPD + Bündnis 90/Die Grünen	SPD	Nine full time	→
Hesse	CDU + FDP	CDU + FDP	—	—
Lower Saxony	SPD	CDU + FDP	Fourteen full time	—
Mecklenburg-West Pomerania	SPD + PDS	SPD + CDU	Seven full time	→
North Rhine-Westphalia	SPD + Bündnis 90/Die Grünen	SPD + Bündnis 90/Die Grünen	Twenty-five full time	→
Rhineland-Palatinate	SPD + FDP	SPD + Bündnis 90/Die Grünen	—	—
Saarland	CDU	CDU	Four full time	→
Saxony	CDU	CDU + FDP	—	→
Saxony-Anhalt	SPD	CDU + SPD	Three full time Six part time	→
Schleswig-Holstein	SPD + Bündnis 90/Die Grünen	CDU + FDP	Eleven full time	→
Thuringia	CDU	CDU + SPD	Seven full time	→

Source: Interviews with leaders of women's ministries administration of German Länder; Lang and Sauer 2011.

Notes. SPD = Social Democratic Party of Germany (center/left); CDU = Christian Democratic Union (center/right); FPD = Free Democratic Party (German Liberals); Bündnis 90/Die Grünen = The Greens; Die Linke = The Left; CSU = Christian Social Union of Bavaria (right); PDS = Party of Democratic Socialism (renamed The Left Party).

^aOn figures.

Table 3 Personnel of Austrian Länder WPA in 2000 and 2011

Länder	Government 2000	Government 2011	Positions in 2011	Comparison of Positions 2000 and 2011
Burgenland	SPÖ + ÖVP	SPÖ + ÖVP	Three full time Two part time	↑
Carinthia	FPÖ + SPÖ + ÖVP	FPK + SPÖ + ÖVP	Two full time Two part time + free lancer	↑
Lower Austria	ÖVP + SPÖ + FPÖ	ÖVP + SPÖ + FPÖ	No figures	→
Upper Austria	ÖVP + SPÖ + FPÖ	ÖVP + SPÖ + FPÖ + Die Grünen	Two full time One part time	↑
Salzburg	ÖVP + SPÖ	SPÖ + ÖVP	Eight full time Two part time	↑
Styria	ÖVP + SPÖ + FPÖ	SPÖ + ÖVP + FPÖ	One full time One trainee	^a -
Tyrol	ÖVP + SPÖ	ÖVP + SPÖ	Three full time	↑
Vorarlberg	ÖVP + FPÖ	ÖVP	Two full time One part time	↑
Vienna	SPÖ + ÖVP	SPÖ + Die Grünen	Twenty-nine full time Eleven part time	↑

Source: Interviews with Landesfrauenreferentinnen of 9 Austrian Länder; Lang and Sauer 2011.

Notes: SPÖ = Social Democratic Party of Austria (center/left), ÖVP = Austrian People's Party (Christian democratic, center/right), FPÖ = Freedom Party of Austria (right-wing populist), FPK = Freedom Party in Carinthia (right-wing populist), Die Grünen = The Greens.

^aNo figures.

on the Länder level promised to compensate for any lack of national funding for women's projects and increased Länder resources for the WPA. Moreover, the threat to abolish the Länder altogether in the Austrian federalism reform discourse might have reduced (party) competition and fostered solidarity. Inadvertently, it might have helped solidify and strengthen the Länder administrations, including WPA.

Conclusion: The Conditionality of Party-Federalism for Gender Equality Architecture

In this article we explored how federalism affects the women's policy architectures in Germany and Austria and, in particular, the degree to which strong and weak federalism creates different institutional anchors for WPA. Overall, we found that cooperative federalism advances a vertically and horizontally dense WPA infrastructure. Even though cooperative federalism is consensus-oriented, conservative, and rather averse to individual Länder experiments and innovation (Wiesenthal 2004), it produced strong WPA in both countries. Rather than women's movement actors utilizing federalism from outside, in both Germany and Austria it was feminists moving *inside* the state that advanced WPA. Hence, cooperative federalism offers more opportunities on different levels for WPA development and activity as allies for women's projects and, thus, for "state-feminism" (McBride Stetson and Mazur 1995).

A second finding regarding the advantage of cooperative federalism is that left/center parties are crucial for advancing gender equality in federal states (see also Chappell and Curtin in this issue). In strong party states with socially homogenous populations, women's movement demands are channeled primarily through center/left parties (Social-Democratic and Green parties). Women's voice and policies, as well as visible gender infrastructure, would thus have to be more prevalent on those levels of politics in which center/left parties are in power. The familiar metaphor of "marble cake federalism" denotes this interplay between state scales and party influence. Resources in the Austrian and German contexts seem to be not so much fragmented, as controlled by more or less centralized parties. WPA appear to be integrated into a hierarchical network of party-affiliated local, regional, and national networks and tend to profit from left party coalitions in power.

A third finding of this article points to economic conditions as an intervening variable in the relationship of federalism and WPA in these cases. We found that in economically stable times interlocking federalism is advantageous for women's policies, but in economically challenging times it tends to produce downward adaptation and the marginalization of women's equality agendas. We find wanting interpretations of interlocking federalism that stress only its negative effects, for example, as creating joint decision traps. In our cases, interlocking federalism early

on generated the push to establish at least a baseline of WPA across Länder. Hesitant political actors were forced to engage with more advanced players in women's policy fields in more informal contexts in Austria, but more formally in Germany. Contagion and upward adaptation seem to have been driving gender politics. But as Austrian and German Länder increasingly faced fiscal constraints, we have found that even in center/left Länder governments, gender politics must compete for resources with what many consider economically more "central" or "system-relevant" fields. Gender politics tends to become subsumed under other diversity agendas or marginalized, unless, as we see in the City States of Vienna and Berlin, a vital women's reform culture and a vocal women's movement exist. Downward adaptation takes place less in Austrian Länder, where the WPA infrastructure is perceived as a counterbalance against a dominant, centralized federal WPA.

Fourth, we found that unlocking interlocking federalism in economically challenging times can produce downward adaptation and marginalization of women's equality agendas. In both Austria and Germany, there were attempts to reform federalism. The more radical abolitionist Austrian debate created a push back from the threatened Länder and increasing WPA leverage and solidarity. By contrast, Germany embarked on two federalism reforms in 2006 and 2009; both of which fell short of their advocates' intentions (Grotz and Poier 2010, 234; Burkhart 2009; Blumenthal 2010), but created frames for public discourse that emphasized fiscal austerity and shedding of "nonessential" state functions. Under conditions of more competitive federalism, WPA are seen by many as nonessential and therefore under strain. Consequently, this competitive devolution might endanger progressive gender reform policies even in strong federal states.

Finally, this article provided evidence that national steering capacity remains central in promoting gender equality. With the tax base of Länder increasingly eroding, while the federal level downloads more responsibility for policy implementation onto the Länder level, the Länder are fiscally squeezed in austerity frameworks in both Austria and in Germany. The choices they make reflect a focus on "hard politics" so that gender equality issues are conflated with other diversity issues. Only if the national level remains committed to exercising its steering capacity will WPA be able to maintain their status as central institutionalized hubs for promoting gender equality.

In the context of what we initially defined as success of WPA, we conclude that federal structures do promote the establishment of units explicitly devoted to gender equality issues on multiple levels of government; but that, overall, the strong cooperative federalism in Germany has guaranteed a more solid and powerful infrastructure than weak Austrian cooperative federalism. Yet there is reason to caution against overdetermination in regard to federalism. Favorable party alignment and economic conditions, in particular also are crucial in order for federalism to develop its impact on WPA in Germany and Austria.

Notes

The authors wish to thank Anja Fellerer, Lisa Wewerka, Ayse Dursun, Elizabeth Zherka, and Sophie Nix who contributed valuable research and editing for this study. We also would like to acknowledge the constructive input we received from participants during the ECPR Joint Sessions Workshop on *Federalism and State Architectures*, organized by Louise Chappell and Petra Meier, in April 2011 in St. Gallen, and from three anonymous reviewers.

1. We conducted semi-structured phone interviews, between 20 and 45 minutes in length. We targeted the respective administrative heads of the Länder WPA and, if they were not available, asked to be referred to deputies or associates with knowledge of the history and personnel situation of the WPA. The interviewees were granted anonymity; citations in the text only identify the Land and date of interview. Interviews were recorded and transcribed unless the interviewee declined taping. In these cases, we took notes. For Germany, two WPA (Rhineland-Palatinate and Saxony) declined to answer questions related to personnel structure due to upcoming elections or other concerns, two other WPA declined to give an interview at all (Bavaria and Hesse).
2. In the transposition process, Länder parliaments do not have much say, which leads to what critics have termed deparliamentarization (for Austria Bußjäger 2010, 126; for Germany von Westphalen and Bellers 2010, 152).
3. For instance, the regular “Conference of the Länder Prime Ministers” (in Germany: Ministerpräsidentenkonferenz; in Austria: Landeshauptleute-Konferenz); regular conferences of head of Ministries and administrative divisions; working groups between federal and Länder level (Goetz 1999; Fallend 2010; Erk 2004).
4. Commentators agree that German federalism reform, while addressing the right issues, did not achieve substantial results. Yet it discursively put the idea of a more competitive federalism squarely into the German public arena.
5. Mission statement at <http://www.frauenbeauftragte.de/die-bag/bag-netzwerk/> (accessed March 28, 2011).
6. www.noel.gv.at (accessed October 12, 2010).
7. Actions in 2010 included, for example, a legislative initiative against genital mutilation (Hesse and Baden-Württemberg); an initiative for quotation of executive boards of private companies (Bremen, Northrhine-Westphalia, and Berlin), or an initiative to regulate the operation of so-called flat-rate brothels (Baden-Württemberg 2010).
8. These are: family and youth (Burgenland, SPÖ), social affairs, work, family, and women (Lower Austria, ÖVP); education, science, women, youth (Upper Austria, ÖVP); in the province of Salzburg the office is established at the office of the provincial governor, a SPÖ women; education, family, women youth (Styria, SPÖ); economy, family, youth, elderly people (Tyrol, ÖVP); social affairs, women, children, generations (Vorarlberg, ÖVP); in Carinthia the women’s section is institutionalized at the office of the deputy provincial governor, the SPÖ chairwomen. In Vienna the women’s minister from SPÖ is responsible for women and public personnel.
9. State secretaries are “junior ministers” and subordinated to the head of the ministry.

10. Examples are the objections of the then ÖVP dominated *Bundesrat* against the liberal abortion law in 1974 and the parental leave regulations in 1986 (Pelinka and Rosenberger 2007, 228).
11. At the time, the Land Vienna, for example, took over funding for many women's projects.
12. Women's increased political representation and power as policy makers does not necessarily alter policy outcome, but women politicians have the power to alter agendas (Celis 2008).
13. At the same time, institutionalization of a women's equality agenda under the auspices of federalism might have, to some degree, weakened attempts of noninstitutionalized actors to influence policies. Women's movement actors in both states are more on the "receiving" end of implementation and not on the initiating front of policy intervention.
14. The woman who became the first State Secretary for Women in conservative Baden-Württemberg in 1988 recalls as late as 1980 being the only woman in her party fraction among sixty-six men.
15. Mecklenburg-West Pomerania established ties to Schleswig-Holstein, Hamburg, and Bremen; Brandenburg to North Rhine-Westphalia and Berlin; Saxony-Anhalt to Lower Saxony; Thuringia to Rhineland-Palatinate, and Saxony to Baden-Württemberg and Bavaria (Goetz 1999, 111 fn 19).
16. By 1992, about 8,400 members of Western Länder civil service worked in their respective Eastern partner administrations in central positions and performed key functions in administrative build up (Goetz 1999, 92). And even though home institutional features were not copied one-to-one, central arrangements can be traced to the influence of the Western partners, also in the case of the women's policy infrastructure.

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