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*Vanja Carlsson*

**Making equality work: Ambiguities, conflicts and change agents in the implementation of equality policies in public sector organisations**

*Anne-Charlott Callerstig. Linköping: Linköping University Electronic Press, 2014, 219 pp.*

The dissertation by Anne-Charlott Callerstigs concerns gender mainstreaming implementation in public sector in Sweden. As a starting point, Callerstig stresses public administration as an important place where the idea and ambition of gender equality expects to be realized. The traditional ideal type of the public administration, based on the work of Max Weber, assumes that public officials are neutral and that the implementation process of political objectives can be portrayed as constituted of several and separable stages. Thus, research has shown that this is not often what the implementation process looks like. Instead, public officials are highly influencing the implementation process due to their own ideological worldviews, as well as further different factors. Since gender mainstreaming, the strategy for integrating an equality perspective into everyday policy planning and delivery, is supposed to be “ongoing” and not able to implement only once it highly questions the traditional ideal type of the function of the public administration. Drawing on a theoretical discussion about the role of the public administration, Callerstig wonders what the influencing factors and the role of actors are when implementing gender mainstreaming in public sector. On a more general level, the question concerns *how* gender mainstreaming is implemented.

Importantly, Callerstig states that there is a lack of feministic implementation research, which is a considerable problem for the research field of implementation of public policy, as well as for the field of feministic research. At the first page of the book Callerstig states that the public administration needs to be studied when analyzing the fate of gender equality politics: “It may in fact be that to a large degree politics is shaped and given

content in public administration more than it being a matter of decisions taken by politicians". I encourage the emphasizing of the relevance for feministic research to study the public administration, and from my point of view it could have been even more highlighted and strongly related to a normative discussion about the state and its values. A quotation from the back cover of the book places the importance of this issue in a broader context:

*In international comparisons, Sweden is among the most equal of societies. However, there seems to be a contradiction between the widespread support for equality as a policy, and the conflicts and ambiguities that arise during its implementation. Yet, not all equality policies are the same; they differ both in terms of their content and the organization of the work. So, how do these presumed differences affect the implementation work? And how do equality workers go about implementing equality policies?*

The empirical and theoretical problem is adequately introduced and the text is engaging, clear and distinct. The introduction chapter gives a well-written presentation of gender mainstreaming as a theoretical concept and its history in politics. Theoretically she combines theories from the implementation field and feminist research on gender mainstreaming. Based on this theoretical framework Callerstig investigates how the implementation of gender mainstreaming works in practice, and what the gender mainstreamers experience as challenges and dilemmas.

As a reader engaged in the research field of implementation of gender equality policy within the public administration, I believe it would have been interesting to follow a theoretical framework drawing on a stronger argumentative stance. Generally, within the field I sometimes find the theoretical discussions on gender equality policy and gender mainstreaming being fairly general or having a guideline approach, and consequently tending to neglect the critical theoretical discussion within feminist theory. The reason for this can be the normative will of feminist researchers to argue *for* gender equality, yet, missing to engage in a critical theoretical discussion about *why* and *how* (*for a discussion about this see also* Bacchi och Rönnblom 2014). The guideline approach can be necessary and useful for instance when the aim is to communicate research knowledge to practitioners, yet can be problematic when the ambition is to participate in a critical theoretical discussion about feministic strategies and gender equality politics. Overall, *Making Equality Work* might have benefitted from a more noticeably emphasizing of what the theoretical problem as well as its contribution is in relation to this research field. However, here it is important to mention the methodological ambition of this dissertation. Callerstig makes use of interactive research and has collaborated with practitioners all through the research process. As Callerstig states:

At the very heart of this approach is the belief that research benefits from the participants everyday lived experiences of the problem that is being studied. The shared

interest in learning more about an issue can be the starting point for a joint project in which researchers and practitioners can work together, bringing in different and complementary knowledge.

This methodological approach is interesting in itself since it challenges and questions the traditional idea of scientific work in general, as in the tradition of political science. Callerstig argues that an interactive approach can be considered a way of embracing a feminist perspective, due to the democratic potentials and dimensions of a joint knowledge production. The methodological perspective is both one strength of the book and a contribution to the feministic field of political science.

With the aim of increasing the knowledge about the implementation process of gender equality, the empirical part consists of implementation of gender equality policies and gender mainstreaming policies in four different public sector organizations in Sweden, altogether an education department, a social service department and a central planning unit in two municipalities, and one government agency that funds research. The results identify the complex conditions and paradoxes that gender mainstreamers have to handle in their everyday work to implement gender equality, as the variations of strategies that different contexts require. One of these conditions is vague equality objectives and directives. The gender equality workers have to interpret these objectives themselves and invent possible solutions. Within the same organization these interpretations and understandings of the concepts of gender, gender equality and gender mainstreaming are not seldom contradictory and conflicting. Callerstig argues that these contradictions can be problematic if ignored, yet fruitful if used as a starting point of discussion about change and the future of equality in the organization. However, she claims that a holistic understanding of what the concept of inequality means is important as a start. *Making Equality Work* contributes with an understanding of the interpretation power that is in the hands of the public servants who transform the political decisions about gender equality into actions on a local level. According to Callerstig, the different interpretations and understandings are highly related to individual ideological beliefs. Thus, in order to understand the outcomes of implementation processes of gender mainstreaming we need to focus thoroughly on these actors and actions, as a complement to text analysis of gender equality policies.

The book also reveals difficulties regarding the measurement and follow up systems of the gender mainstreaming work in organizations. One frequent problem is to find an adequate way to measure the very vague and unclear gender equality objectives, as to find a way to follow up and analyze the gender mainstreaming process. Furthermore, the gender mainstreaming work has different terms and conditions depending on level of the organization, yet too often the follow up systems do not take sufficient account of this. The study also shows that the organizations, when striving for efficiency, handle the problem of measuring the vague objectives by changing the objectives so that they will be able to measure. Overall, the actors and the organizations must elaborate and deal with problems relating to measurement and accounting, which brings up the significant question of responsibility. What are we implementing when we are implementing gender equality

policies? Why are we implementing gender equality? And who is responsible for the implementation?

In sum, the different cases together illustrate the complexity and dilemmas of implementing gender mainstreaming within very different contexts of the public sector. Accordingly, the relatively strong general and discursive consensus on gender equality in Sweden is not a guarantee for a successful implementation. Gender equality as a policy area is regularly managed by being integrated into other policy areas with other goals and aims. I believe the logic for this can be summarized as follows: in order to develop and ensure quality within an established policy area, for example care policy or education policy, a gender perspective is added to the goals and actions plans of the established policy areas. This way of managing gender equality can be perceived as rational if we consider the aim of the gender equality policy being that a gender perspective should be integrating all policy areas within society. However, *Making Equality Work* and other studies of gender equality policy in Sweden has demonstrated that gender equality as a policy area is often neglected in comparison to other policy areas, and that gender equality policy often is reduced to symbolics (see Ivarsson Westerberg, 2013; Rönnblom, 2009; Rönnblom – Hudson, 2007; Isaksson, 2010). Thus, the steering philosophy risks at reduce the space for politics, hence contributes to de-politicization of gender equality policy. The integration of gender equality policy into other policy areas is therefore problematic since it assumes harmony between and within power structures. I argue that the empirical results of *Making Equality Work* encourage feminist research to pay attention to and critically theorize the management of gender equality within the public administration.

### *References*

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