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Abstract

The EU's regional policy is one of the world's largest in terms of budget size and geographical range. The regional policy promotes project activities across Europe funded by structural funds, of which the European Social Fund (ESF) is one. Its goal is to increase employment, competitiveness and growth, as well as gender equality. Throughout the history of the EU, there has been a tension between formulation of gender equality policy and economic and social issues. However, scholars make the case that the Commission approaches ESF gender equality from a neoliberal perspective. The ESF's gender equality policy is implemented through administrative processes in national and regional public administration. While public administration plays a central role, scholars know less about *how* these processes are being played out in practice, and what their significance is for defining a gender perspective in the member states. Variations in member states' implementation have not been extensively studied. Drawing on the debate of the last decades on changes in public sector governance, and a conceptualisation of ideological processes in implementation, this dissertation analyses differences in implementation of the ESF's gender equality policy in Sweden and Spain. A network-oriented model was applied in Sweden, whereas in Spain a hierarchical/bureaucratic model was applied. The empirical material is based on interviews and policy documents at EU-level as well as at national and regional level. Through analysis of the relationship between governing and substantive interpretations of political objectives, the purpose of this dissertation is to analyse whether organisational and working practices in Sweden and Spain reinforced or challenged the EU's interpretation and implementation of gender equality. The theoretical research questions are I. *Under what conditions do forms of governance reproduce or change substantive interpretations of policy objectives?* II. *Under what conditions do substantive interpretations of policy objectives affect forms of governance?*

I argue that there are mechanisms inherent in administrative processes which have ideological consequences, i.e. which affect local interpretations and set limits for discretion in multilevel governance. Unlike previous feminist studies of bureaucracy, I argue that, in comparison with the network model, the bureaucratic model is beneficial for potential policy change in relation to issues of informal power structures, gender equality for example. The paper will also contribute to a discussion on ideological consequences of gender equality policies when private actors are involved in the implementation process, as in the network-oriented model. The results also highlight the need to distinguish between organisational forms and management techniques when operationalising the concept of governing. Such a distinction contributes to a nuanced discussion of the consequences of governance. One conclusion is that, as an organisational form, the network tends to be dominated by bureaucratic management techniques in cases where there is no substantive definition of policy.

Keywords

Gender equality policy, European social fund, network governance, bureaucratic governance, Sweden, Spain, multi-level governance



FÖRVALTNINGSHÖGSKOLAN

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