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## Original Article

# Comparative gender and policy projects in Europe: Current trends in theory, method and research

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**Abstract** This paper examines nine cross-national research projects on gender and policy in Europe at different stages of completion. In the first part of the paper, the infrastructure, analytical foci, methodological approach theoretical framework and policy relevance are examined for each project. General research findings are presented in cases where projects have been completed. In the second part of the paper, a composite profile is presented from the European-based projects across seven shared features with an eye toward identifying current trends in feminist comparative policy as a field of study.

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## Introduction

International collaboration has been a major hallmark of the growth and development of comparative scholarship on gender and policy since the early feminist comparative policy (FCP) studies first came out in the 1980s.<sup>1</sup> Today, it has become a permanent fixture of this new and increasingly institutionalized field. In the mid-1990s, researchers began to form more structured networks to carry out large-scale projects that combined cross-national comparative analysis with country-based expertise. A first wave of projects conducted national (for example, Brodie, 1995, 1996; Bakker, 1996; Abrar *et al*, 1998) and regional studies (Bergqvist *et al*, 1999). Several years later, a second wave of studies took a more cross-national approach, including more countries, with the organization of large international networks of country experts that developed integrated research designs, coordinated highly complex cross-national projects and received significant levels of public funding.<sup>2</sup>



A part of this second wave was to examine the European-specific gender and policy puzzle in the context of Europeanization and the formation of gender mainstreaming and other feminist policies at the national level. Increased European Union (EU) funding for gender mainstreaming and gender equality from the Fifth and Sixth Framework Programmes has been a driving force in the development of large-scale ambitious research programs.

Given the increasing prominence of these large cross-national studies, this paper examines nine second-wave projects, listed in Table 1 and, in doing so, develops a composite picture of current trends in comparative gender and policy scholarship.

Although by no means the only projects that take a cross-national perspective (for example, Beveridge *et al.*, 2000; Hirschmann and Liebert, 2001; Lister and Carbone, 2006; Bayes *et al.*, 2006; Kittilson, 2006, 2008), these nine studies were selected for their relatively high levels of funding and of developed research infrastructure and for combining large ‘*n*’ cross-national comparative analysis with qualitative country-specific studies. The overview of a large number of projects, rather than in-depth analysis of a few examples, is undertaken here to provide a more systematic assessment of the full range of current comparative research on gender and policy. Given the ‘applied feminist empirical approach’ of FCP (Mazur, 2002), where empirical studies follow

**Table 1:** List of FCP research projects

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Women’s movements and reconfigured states (1997–2003) Banaszak <i>et al.</i> (2003) Gendering Europeanization (1999–2003) Liebert (2003) RNGS (1995–2009). Research network on gender politics and the state <a href="http://libarts.wsu.edu/polisci/rngs">http://libarts.wsu.edu/polisci/rngs</a> EGG (2002–2005). Enlargement, gender and governance: The civic and political participation and representation of women in Central and Eastern Europe <a href="http://www.qub.ac.uk/egg/">http://www.qub.ac.uk/egg/</a> MAGEEQ (2003–2007). Policy frames and implementation problems: The case of gender mainstreaming <a href="http://www.mageeq.net/">http://www.mageeq.net/</a> QUING (2006–2011). Quality in gender equality + policies <a href="http://www.quiring.eu/">http://www.quiring.eu/</a> FEMCIT (2006–2010). Gendered citizenship in multi-cultural Europe: The impact of contemporary women’s movements <a href="http://www.femcit.org">http://www.femcit.org</a> VEIL (2006–2009). Values equality and differences in liberal democracies <a href="http://www.univie.ac.at/veil/">http://www.univie.ac.at/veil/</a> Governing difference (2006–2009). A challenge for new democracies in Central and South Eastern European countries <a href="http://typo3.univie.ac.at/index.php?id=17202">http://typo3.univie.ac.at/index.php?id=17202</a>
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social science methodologies and are problem-driven, the assessment of each project covers project infrastructure, research questions, methodology, theory, results and policy relevance.<sup>3</sup> An overview of the nine projects is presented in the first section, the second section identifies seven features shared by the nine projects. The conclusion reflects upon these nine projects in terms of current trends and future directions of the relatively new field of FCP.

## **Overview of Second-Wave Projects**

### **Women's movements and reconfigured states (1997–2003)**

Starting in 1997 and meeting three times until 1999, a group of experts from five countries with their graduate students and under the leadership of Lee Ann Banaszak (Pennsylvania State University), Karen Beckwith (Case Western University) and Dieter Rucht (Social Science Research Center, Berlin), discussed and developed a common theoretical framework and assessed in-progress research findings to study the relationship between women's movements and the state in Western European and North America. Final findings were presented in 2001 at an American Political Science Association meeting and published in an edited volume (Banaszak *et al*, 2003). The project received funding from the Council for European Studies and the universities of project participants. The major research question was: how and why did reconfigured states affect the relations between women's movements and the state between the 1970s and 1990s?

The study focussed on the development of women's movement strategies and discourse and the access of the women's movements to policy-making arenas and their influence on policy outcomes. The starting claim was that women's movements in the West had followed a similar trajectory of development from the 1970s to the 1990s with regards to the state, albeit with some cross-national variation. Researchers determined whether this pattern of movement–state interaction was followed in the countries covered in the study and if so, why or why not. The group identified 'the reconfigured state' as a hypothesis to explore in country and cross-national studies. Group members examined the impact of the shifting state in four types of state reconfigurations across two time periods (the 1970s and 1980s–1990s), across a variety of policy areas (political representation, violence against women, abortion constitution building and citizenship) and across a collection of Western European and North American countries (Spain, Italy, Sweden, England, Scotland and Northern Ireland, the United States, Canada, Germany, France and Ireland).

The study built from and sought to contribute to theories on social movements, state–society relations, women's movements and public policy.



A ‘most similar systems’ design was followed (Collier, 1993). Countries included in the study displayed similar levels of economic and state development, particularly with regard to state reconfiguration. The selection of countries, however, was not linked to testing hypotheses about cultural or political differences. Similarly, although women’s movement–state relations were examined on different issues, there was no effort to pick a representative range of issues or to analyze them in all of the countries in the study. Neither a single methodological approach was adopted – qualitative, quantitative or mixed (Cresswell, 2003) – nor did the researchers follow the same data collection protocol.

Study results showed that women’s movement–state interactions are both influenced by and have effects on state reconfiguration. Responding to the reconfiguring state, women’s movements changed their strategies and in turn influenced the state and public policy in a new way. More than general characteristics of movements, such as life cycle, movement resources and personnel, it is the opportunities and challenges posed by state reconfiguration that shaped women’s movement relations with the state. Despite diverging national and sub-national contexts, the study found that women’s movement–state relations followed a quite similar trend. The study pinpointed the following factors that helped women’s movements to influence policy: change in state discourse; the state’s capacity to gender policy discourse; the ability of women’s movements to form alliances with other agents; high salience of certain policy issues for the state; the presence of women’s movements willing to help implement policies; and the path-dependent nature of movement–state interactions. Although the book highlighted the importance of dialoguing with both feminist and non-feminist scholarship, there was no specific discussion of how the study could help women’s movement activists or practitioners; in other words, the audience was purely academic.

### **Gendering Europeanization (1999–2003)**

The second group was also convened to conduct a moderately sized project to produce an edited book (Liebert, 2003). Ulrike Liebert (University of Brëmen) established a ‘working group’ in 1999, secured funding from the German Science Foundation and organized several group meetings throughout the duration of the project. Graduate students and country experts worked together on the development of the design, study coordination, data collection and final analysis. Their goal was to assess systematically the impact of Europeanization on member states through the lens of gender equality policy. The central question was: to what degree did member states adopt and implement the new sex equality norms and directives of the EU? The study was

designed to address findings of other studies that had shown an ever increasing policy convergence between member states and to assess the claim that different types of ‘gender policy regimes’ (for example, Orloff, 2002) in Europe had led to divergent national approaches to sex equality policy on the backdrop of national compliance with EU gender equality directives.

Combining institutional and constructivist approaches to political analysis, the model of the study suggested four possible series of contributing factors to domestic convergence with the EU policy framework: domestic gender ‘framework’ or regime; ‘environmental’; ‘cognitive’; and ‘interactions.’ The dependent variable – the adoption of an EU policy framework – was operationalized in terms of norms and discourse. Hirschmann’s (1998) call for a more ‘cross-cultural’ approach to gender analysis was followed. Non-native experts worked next to native country experts to analyze the discursive patterns and politics around Europeans in each country. The project used the comparative method through ‘diversity-oriented research’ or Qualitative Comparative Analysis (QCA) where the observation or case contains a constellation of factors that produce a given outcome and cases for study are selected for similar outcomes with different combinations of factors (Rihoux and Ragin, 2008). In this study, country cases were selected for a similar outcome of legislative convergence with EU directives.

The seven countries in the study – France, Germany, Italy, Great Britain, Spain and Sweden – were also selected to represent the three different ‘worlds of welfare,’ identified by Esping-Andersen (1990) and different ‘democratic traditions’ with regard to women’s voting rights. A common framework structured each country analysis and the analyses were based on primary and secondary sources. A ‘diagnostic case’ was selected for each country to provide an in-depth analysis of a specific EU policy issue that presented a challenge to EU convergence. Researchers systematically used ‘process tracing’ (Munk, 2004) for each diagnostic case to identify the position of actors, the framing of the issue and the policy outcome.

The study found five different patterns of Europeanization – ‘stubbornness,’ ‘compliance,’ ‘domestication,’ ‘transformation’ and ‘innovation.’ Although distinct gender regimes and policy approaches at the domestic level provided opportunities for innovation and transformation, they were also a fertile ground for resistance; ‘domestic bottlenecks’ through which EU equality norms must pass. The study suggested that the explanation for cross-national variation in the ‘domestic bottleneck’ consisted of more than just divergences between national politics, culture and framing, and EU norms. Rather, it was the way in which gender was brought into these various processes – the type of gender regime, how gender issues are framed and how key policy communities deal with gender issues; in other words, how Europeanization became gendered in each country. In addition, the study indicated that gender equality regimes



at the domestic level have become less divergent than in the past, but diversity was still important.

The project encouraged a dialogue between feminist and non-feminist work on Europe, showed a way to bridge the gap between institutional and social constructivist approaches and raised methodological challenges for studying the complex process of Europeanization in the context of current cultural difference and future EU enlargement. Similar to the first study, there was no mention of the policy implications of the study beyond academia.

### **RNGS (1995–2009): Research Network on Gender, Politics and the State**

Created in 1995 as a response to the weaknesses of an initial cross-national study of women's policy agencies (WPAs) (McBride and Mazur, 1995), RNGS is comprised of 40 researchers from 16 countries and 145 associates. From the beginning, RNGS members have met regularly to develop the complex multi-phase research design and present findings; over 30 meetings in all. Receiving significant public funding, the network is coordinated by two project leaders, Dorothy McBride (Florida Atlantic University) and Amy Mazur (Washington State University) and is comprised of five issue networks, 16 country teams and over 120 associates.<sup>4</sup> Throughout the project, graduate students have participated in the RNGS study. RNGS examines the following questions: if, how, and why do WPAs make post-industrial democracies more democratic and the state more feminist by helping women's movement actors and ideas gain entry to the state as a way to represent women more generally?<sup>5</sup> In other words, the study assesses the dynamics and determinants of state feminism.

The network conducted a systematic analysis of these questions across the full range of policy issues that could potentially affect gender relations and over the period of time of women's movements mobilization in Western post-industrial democracies from the 1970s to the present. Country studies were conducted in five areas by experts of each country: job training, abortion, prostitution, political representation and issues of national significance, the 'hot issue.' The unit of analysis was the policy debate, and not the country, which takes place in a public arena and ends with an official state decision or non-decision. Researchers developed a set of criteria for selecting three representative debates for each issue area in each country and for the hot issue. Framing is a major analytical focus of the RNGS study. Here, the policy-making process is seen as a conflict of ideas and that actors struggle over the political meaning of problems and policy. The dominant frame for each policy debate is identified as well as the 'micro frames' of the WPAs and the women's

movement actors who took a position on the issue to see if the debate frame was gendered and if so by which policy actors/frames.

RNGS has taken a mixed-methods approach, seeking to 'bridge the qualitative and quantitative divide' (Tarrow, 2004). In a first qualitative phase, researchers in Australia, Austria, Belgium, Canada, Finland, France, Germany, Great Britain, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Japan, the Netherlands, Spain, Sweden and the United States studied between one and four debates on the five issues: not all issues were studied in all countries. Five books presented the findings of the qualitative phase, one on each issue (Mazur, 2001; McBride, 2001; Outshoorn, 2004; Lovenduski, 2005b; Haussman and Sauer, 2007).<sup>6</sup> In a second quantitative phase, RNGS researchers transposed the major concepts of the qualitative model into a set of numerically based variables operationalized to facilitate testing the project's hypotheses and to provide user-friendly information about the policy debates, policy subsystems, women's movements and WPAs. This process involved the construction of a codebook and a SPSS data set available on the RNGS website <http://libarts.wsu.edu/polisci/rngs>, which contains 130 policy debates/observations from 13 countries coded on over 200 variables.

While each book presented results about state feminism for that particular issue area showing the variation of rates of state feminism across issue areas, the final phase of the RNGS study seeks to analyze the presence of state feminist dynamics across all issues in a single 'capstone' book that uses a multi-methods approach. Indeed, the large number of variables and the limited number of observations in each issue book meant that the issue-based findings only presented a partial picture. The final capstone analysis 'triangulates' the quantitative and qualitative data through statistical methods, QCA and case studies (Tarrow, 2004). The findings point to the multiple paths to successful state feminism and the important, but not crucial, role of WPAs in enhancing women's representation within state arenas. There is a clear variation to successful state feminism by issue area, but not by country. Also, success does not necessarily occur under left-wing governments, when women's movements are strong or when WPAs are more powerful. Despite the complex patterns in state feminism, the capstone analysis definitively shows that WPAs are a permanent presence within the state and are important partners for women's movements to make a difference in public policy and hence have an important part to play in making stable democracies more democratic.

Although RNGS has been primarily an academic research and theory-building endeavor with an eye toward making contributions to both feminist and non-feminist scholarship, the project from the beginning has made connections to a more policy-oriented audience in dissemination, including the presentation of findings in 2005 at a conference at the Institute for Women's



Policy Research, a US-based think tank, and at a United Nations Expert Group Meeting on Women's Political Participation and a subsequent meeting of the UN's Commission on the Status of Women.

### **EGG (2002–2007): Enlargement, Gender and Governance – The civic and political participation and representation of women in Central and Eastern Europe**

Established with a grant from the EU Fifth Programme and under the leadership of Yvonne Galligan at Queens University, Belfast, the EGG consisted of a consortium of eight partners from the United Kingdom, Italy, Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia. Numerous research meetings were held for the duration of the project, including a meeting at the European Parliament where project findings and recommendations were presented to a range of civil society and government actors. The project description, empirically rich country reports and a final comparative report are available on the group's website (<http://www.qub.ac.uk/egg/>). A co-authored book, based on the project findings, was published in 2007 (Galligan *et al*, 2007)

Seeking to conduct the first systematic study of women's political participation in the emerging democracies of Central and Eastern Europe, the central research questions for the EGG were: to what degree have the twin forces of democratization and EU accession enhanced women's participation? And, what are the major forces that explain the record of women's political participation? The major task of the group was to map out women's political participation and representation in the 11 countries in the post-communist phase through an examination of women's civic participation, women's formal representation and the interface between the process of country accession to the EU and gender equality policies at the national level. Country-based researchers conducted primary and secondary research, collected survey results and data on women in politics as well as conducted a total of 280 semi-structured interviews across the 10 countries from 2003 to 2005. Although there was some coordination between the country research, there was no single formal framework, methodological approach or research protocol to organize the research as in the case of the some of the other projects examined in this paper.

The final project book placed the more descriptive project findings into the theoretical context of feminist scholarship on women's representation. The findings for the 10 countries were presented in terms of first symbolic representation and then the links between women's descriptive presence in

ected office and their substantive representation in WPAs and policy outcomes through the lens of both national policies and the Europeanization of gender equality. The project and the book showed that although there have been certain gains made in women's representation through the process of Europeanization and democratization, progress has been slow and uneven depending on the country. Gender attitudes and norms and the political opportunity structure of a given country were identified as important obstacles to women's enhanced representation. The study asserted the importance of keeping gender inclusiveness at the center of Europeanization as well as the extent to which 'gendering democratic governance' should be seen as 'a transformative process.'

### **MAGEEQ (2003–2007): Policy frames and implementation problems – The case of gender mainstreaming**

MAGEEQ was created as a result of funding from the EU Fifth Framework Programme in 2003. Comprised of 24 researchers, from six European countries, Austria, the Netherlands, Spain, Slovenia, Hungary and Greece and under the leadership of Mieke Verloo (University of Nijmegen), MAGEEQ was overseen by a consortium of six member organizations from each of the six participant countries. The group met numerous times to develop the framework of the study, to create and fine-tune a new analytical tool to analyze policy used in the MAGEEQ study, and to discuss findings. Project funding also financed meetings to disseminate results and to hold public debates with stakeholders on gender equality policy at the international and national levels. This applied aspect was an important part of the overall design of the study; MAGEEQ members sought to bring their findings to the actors themselves to improve the gender equality policy process itself. The group developed a project website (<http://www.mageeq.net/>) and produced country reports on gender equality policies in each country, numerous conference papers and publications, and a final book that presents the project results (Verloo, 2007).

MAGEEQ's central question was: what is the meaning of the notion of gender equality as it is used in formal policy statements on policies that seek to promote women's status and rights and strike down gender-based hierarchies? The importance of the public definition of core principles in policies, and the struggle over that definition, has had a long history in policy analysis (for example, Schattschneider, 1960), in social movement theory (for example, Snow and Benford, 1992) and in feminist policy research (for example, McBride, 1987; Jenson, 1988; Outshoorn, 1991). The argument is that, the way issues get defined in policies through problem definition and policy



formulation has an important imprint on the outcome and impact of policies. MAGEEQ directly developed this research question as a response to work on gender equality policy in Europe and the EU that found that the way goals of gender equality were defined in the policy process hampered effective policy implementation (for example, Pollack and Hafner-Burton, 2000; Gottfried and Reese, 2003).

Definitions of gender equality were examined in six different European countries, selected to represent the cultural diversity of the EU: Slovenia and Hungary from ‘the East,’ Spain and Greece from ‘the South,’ and the Netherlands and Austria from ‘the West.’ Policy content at the EU level was also studied by MAGEEQ. Case selection was not used as a means to test for a hypothesis of potential cross-national patterns in the definition of gender equality and potential determinants. Instead, MAGEEQ took an interpretive/social constructivist approach that eschews empirically based hypothesis testing for analyzing the social construction of reality in texts and practices.

In the context of this social constructivist approach, MAGEEQ developed a new analytical tool to evaluate the frames of specific policies, Critical Frame Analysis. Researchers were asked to select a series of key equality policies and conduct analyses of specific official documents or ‘texts’ on a given policy and record their analysis on a common template that included the following major categories: ‘voice’ (the actors who articulate a position), ‘diagnosis’ (the assessment of the problem) and ‘prognosis’ (the proposed solutions). Following feedback from field research, a focus on intersectional issues of race and ethnicity were added to the template later in the study. Analyses of policies from 1995 to 2004 were conducted on three different issues in all countries – political participation and representation, domestic violence and reconciliation, and in a single issue in each country that generated debate. The periodization of the study was established to determine to what degree the formal treatment of gender equality had responded to international calls for gender mainstreaming coming out of the 1995 UN Women’s Conference and the Treaty of Amsterdam of the EU.

In all, 366 texts were analyzed. These included official laws, national level and EU reports, parliamentary debates, media coverage, expert reports and NGO documents.

The findings show that there is a ‘tremendous diversity’ of approaches under the label gender equality (Verloo, 2007). In many current gender equality policies, the proposed policy solutions do not address the identified problems and women-friendly policy actors, for example, women’s movement representatives and feminist actors, are not given formal roles or are clearly excluded from the process.

## **QUING (2006–2011): Quality in gender equality + policies**

Adopting the analytical instrument of MAGEEQ and expanding on the first study's design, a much larger group, with 57 members, secured EU funding, once again under the Sixth Framework Programme, to conduct an ambitious multi-dimensional study. Under the continuing leadership of Meike Verloo, QUING seeks to examine 'quality in gender and other equality policies' or 'gender + equality policies.' With a website (<http://www.quing.eu/>) and five different sub-studies, each with different project leaders, QUING began to meet regularly in 2006 to finalize the analytical framework and research plan. Results are to be presented in early 2009 and the project completed in 2011.

The major goal of the project is to systematically map out equality policies addressing all forms of inequality based on race, class, gender, religion, ethnicity, sexual orientation, disability and so on, in the 25 member states of the EU and the candidate countries of Bulgaria, Romania, Croatia and Turkey. The EU level is also to be addressed. This expanded focus is the result of the ongoing enlargement of the EU and the development of EU-level policies that target other forms of discrimination and inequality than gender in a 2000 directive and the 2000 Charter of Fundamental Rights, for example. As the QUING project description and other analysts have indicated, to expand the study to new member states and candidates and to a wider range of equality policies raises a new set of methodological and theoretical challenges to be worked out collaboratively by the group. Beyond identifying the gender + equality policies, the group seeks to assess the meaning and content of the policies as well as the 'quality' of the policy with regard to their 'transformative potential,' the treatment of the full panoply of inequalities and the extent to which movement actors are included in the process. The content and meaning of the gender + equality policies is being examined more specifically in three areas: gender-based violence, intimate citizenship and non-employment.

The first two components of the study focus on the analytical aspect of the project. LARG is conducting the research on the meaning, content and quality of the policies. WHY analyzes the cross-national similarities and differences in the meaning, content, participation of actors and timing of the policies in terms of the differences in civil society in each country and other important explanatory factors. STRIQ focuses on how to conceptualize the different types of inequalities and their interconnections, in large part through feminist scholarship on intersectionality, and is conducting an empirical analysis of how the different areas of inequality are addressed in the policies covered in the study. With this analysis, the STRIQ group aims to make policy recommendations on how to better address the full range of inequalities. FRAGEN's aim is



to construct and make available to the public a database of women's movement texts from the 1970s to the present from the countries in the study and at the EU level. The last part of the project, OPERA, will develop training programs from the empirical findings for policy practitioners and activists interested in promoting gender + equality. Thus, QUING continues the strong dual emphasis of MAGEEQ on speaking to academic and more policy-orienting communities through the dissemination of empirical findings and databases and training modules.

### **FEMCIT (2006–2010): Gendered citizenship in multicultural Europe: The impact of contemporary women's movements**

Awarded an EU Sixth Framework Programme grant in 2006 for 3.9 million euros, FEMCIT is comprised of 15 institutional partners in Norway, Sweden, Spain, France, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom, Poland and the Czech Republic, from different disciplines of social sciences and humanities. Under the leadership of Sevil Sümer (University of Bergen), FEMCIT has a steering committee, a members' assembly and an advisory council. Five meetings have been held since the group first began its work in 2007 and the project's website is at <http://www.femcit.org>. FEMCIT aims to hold an annual public conference to disseminate project findings, publish results in refereed journals, publish an anthology, present a report to pertinent non-governmental and governmental agencies and groups, and organize meetings for policy practitioners and activists. FEMCIT also includes a separate component dedicated to developing graduate-level training on conducting research on citizenship including new graduate courses on citizenship.

FEMCIT seeks to answer the following questions: what is the role and impact of women's movements in changing conceptions and practices of citizenship in a gendered context? How does that citizenship crosscut race/ethnicity class, religion, sexuality, region and nationality? The project examines the reality and construction of women's citizenship, the influence of feminist/women's movements on citizenship and the policy impact of changing notions of citizenship across six different areas of citizenship: political, economic, ethnic and religious, sexual and bodily and intimate citizenship. The link between definitions of citizenship and policy is an important area of investigation for the project. Each of the six areas has a separate work group of 2–5 people, which determines the research design and specific selection of countries to be examined within the broader design of the project; a different selection of countries will be made by each group.

The approach of the project is 'critical, interdisciplinary, cross-national and multidimensional.' In designing the research and carrying out the study, the

group seeks to bring together a diverse set of cultural and disciplinary perspectives that takes critical perspectives of the core concepts used in the project to make them more accurate. It makes links with another EU-funded project, Athena, that studies how concepts are used in different EU countries. Imbued by ‘standpoint’ (Harding, 1987) feminist approaches to research, FEMCIT operates as a collective and also tries to complement the top-down policy analysis approach with a bottom-up approach where citizens from different countries of the study are interviewed.

The study does not have any specific hypotheses about gendered citizenship, does not present a common methodological approach or suggest that the same countries should be studied in each of the six sub-groups. The following countries are included: Sweden, Poland, the United Kingdom, Spain and Bosnia by the political citizenship group and Sweden, the Netherlands and the Czech Republic for the sexual citizenship group. A separate sub-group coordinates the work of the six substantive strands to bring together the results of the studies in order to propose a new ‘multi-cultural and comprehensive’ understanding of citizenship for academics, practitioners and activists.

### **VEIL (2006–2009): Values equality and differences in liberal democracies**

With a 1.2 million euro grant from the Sixth Framework Programme, VEIL is comprised of eight institutional partners with 21 researchers and is under the leadership of Sieglinde Rosenberger and Birgit Sauer, both at the University of Vienna. With five meetings already held, VEIL has its research well under way. Summaries of country reports are available on the project website, <http://www.veil-project.eu/>, and the group intends to disseminate findings in both scholarly and policy-oriented venues, including public fora intended to engage policy makers, politicians, women’s groups and members of Muslim communities.

The central research question of the VEIL project is: what are the dynamics and drivers of veiling policies in Europe and the impact of those policies on society? The group investigates public debates, disagreements and policies on veiling – ‘body coverings of Muslim women’ in Europe – with a focus on debates that take place with regard to schools, universities and the courts. Given the degree to which the highly contested debates and policies on head scarves touch upon basic values in a democratic society, the role of religion, gender and collective identity, this study addresses larger questions about European integration and liberal democracy.

The starting point for the project is the divergence in policy responses to veiling practices in EU member-states. The study seeks to explain the similarities and differences of national policy on veiling in terms of the



following factors or ‘assumptions’ that comprise the ‘opportunity structure’ around issues of veiling in each country: ‘migration and immigration regimes,’ patterns of church–state relations, recognition of religious groups, gender regimes and the ‘institutional setting.’ The project also identifies the way the headscarf issue has been framed and the values and norms about gender and religious practice expressed by the actors in the debate as important influences on policy outcomes.

The study assesses this comparative puzzle in eight different countries that represent different responses to the veiling issue: Austria, Denmark, France, Germany, Greece, the Netherlands, Turkey and the United Kingdom. Framing is the major focus of the research; the project has developed a gender-critical analysis in examining policy and media debates in official documents and texts and their impact on policy outcomes. Special attention is given to the norms and values expressed in the debates. Detailed analyses of the debates and policies in each country are being conducted as well as a cross-national analysis that sorts through the importance of the opportunity structure factors in explaining similarities and differences between the country cases.<sup>7</sup> The VEIL project is highly policy-relevant with a problem-driven research design that seeks to understand how religious differences can be accommodated in a democratic society and an applied approach that seeks to promote a dialogue with various stakeholders involved with policy issue at the national and international levels.

### **Governing difference (2006–2009): A challenge for new democracies in Central and South Eastern European countries**

Funded by a small Austrian government grant, the *Governing Difference* project focuses on a specific set of issues in a single region of Europe. With a four-member steering committee of political scientists and legal scholars, the project was launched in 2008 with its own website (<http://typo3.univie.ac.at/index.php?id=17202>) and is under the same leadership as the VEIL project. Four Central and South Eastern European countries are covered by the project: Slovenia, Bulgaria, Bosnia-Herzegovina and Croatia. The group has produced country reports, available on the website, and is currently working on a comparative analysis of the central issues of the study.

The research question of the project is: how do governments deal with deep religious, cultural and ethnic difference as they intersect with gender? The countries of Central and South Eastern Europe or the Balkans provide instances of highly divided societies which have undergone ‘violent transformation’ and are continuing to be in economic and political flux. Given an increasing body of research that draws attention to the way in which gender

has been intertwined with the processes of dislocation and change in the Balkans, the study seeks to conduct a systematic investigation of the intersection of gender, religion and ethnicity through three policy issues that are hotly contested and that inherently bring forward issues of gender, religion and ethnicity: early-forced marriage, honor-related violence and veiling by Muslim women.

The analysis explores the similarities and differences across the four countries in terms of differences in culture and their impact on nation building and on each country's approach to achieving EU membership, specific religious configurations and the way customs and practices of Islam are perceived. Four general questions structure the analysis: (1) how is gender and women's rights treated in these debates as it relates to religion and ethnicity; (2) what 'institutional arrangements' in government have been created to deal with cultural diversity, religious freedom and gender equality; (3) what are the difference in policy-making dynamics in terms of government responses and the lineup of state and non-state actors; and (4) how has the prospect of joining the EU affected the debates and policy response?

The study takes two approaches to its research design: a 'critical frame analysis' to analyze the public debates around the three issues and a more legal-oriented approach that looks at the legal framework, practices and jurisprudence on each issue. The organizing group plans to conduct in-depth analyses of all three questions, including the critical analysis of frames in debate and then move to more field-intensive research on each issue area with a focus on structured elite interviews with pertinent actors, active and implicated by the policy or stakeholders. The group aims to meet regularly with public officials, for the most part in the Balkans section of The Austrian Ministry of Foreign affairs, to get feedback on the progress of the study. A mixture of academics and stakeholders, including members of the Muslim communities, will be invited to the closing conference from Austria and the four countries included in the study; establishing links with institutional partners in each country is a part of the project.

## **Common Features**

The nine projects reviewed in this paper share a striking number of commonalities. Commonalities that are reinforced by the diffusion and exchange of ideas between the various groups; at least 10 scholars participate in more than one group. Here, seven features shared by most of the projects are presented.



### **1. An international collaborative group with funding and infrastructure**

All of the projects include a structured group of country experts and/or researchers from each country in the study that meet regularly to discuss the research design, data collection issues and results as well as to participate in study dissemination. All of the projects obtained funding from public research organizations, seven out of nine from EU Framework funding, for over 11 million euros in all. Study coordination and dissemination was facilitated by a network website as well, meaning that project findings have been made available to the public well after the end of the project.

### **2. An academic, policy-oriented and educational focus**

All of the studies publish results in scholarly outlets. Seven out of nine explicitly share findings with more applied policy audiences through the dissemination of findings, policy recommendations, public fora, development of training for stakeholders and bringing public officials into the design phases of the project. These activities were held at local, national and EU levels. It is clear, in large part owing to funding requirements, that connecting projects to stakeholders, if not directly influencing policy outcomes, is an important theme running throughout the projects. Graduate student education was also an integral part of project organization with all groups including graduate students as staff and researchers and one project, FEMCIT, had a course design component.

### **3. Bringing in gender, women's movements, policy, debates/framing, institutions and intersectionality**

Research foci, central research questions and similar findings are also shared to a certain degree across the projects. All of the projects brought gender in as a unit of analysis where gendered notions or gender processes are important objects of analysis or driving forces. Several of the studies identified dominant gender norms and attitudes as important obstacles to achieving feminist policy outcomes. For most of the projects, the women's movement is a significant part of the analytical puzzle either through specifically analyzing the role and influence of women's movements or tracing the presence of women's movement actors and ideas in policy debates; several studies showed that policy change was difficult without the active presence of women's movement actors. Several projects have assembled unprecedented data sets on women's movements across issues and over time. Women's movements are seen as important agents of representation and the policy-making arena, within and

outside of legislatures, with state-based policy making arenas being potential sites for women's substantive and descriptive representation.

All of the studies focus on state-based action either through an analysis of policy debates or of links between problem definition and policy outcomes. Policy debates and framing are important units of analysis with particular attention paid to the construction of public meanings and discourses. The studies tend to focus on policy development, formulation and content of formal policy statements and legal frameworks; very little attention is paid to the intricacies of the implementation or the impact of those policies on women's status and rights. Institutions are also an important shared object of analysis; through treatment of the state as a whole. Examples of this analytical focus include the analysis of state-based actors and agencies or analysing that institutional arrangements, or the 'political opportunity structure' (McAdam *et al*, 1996). In the more recent studies, intersections between gender, race, class, culture, sexual orientation as an important focus.

#### **4. Operationalize and contribute to feminist and non-feminist theory with a focus on democracy and representation**

Both feminist and non-feminist theories are used across the studies, with several studies explicitly seeking to bridge the gap between feminist studies and other political analyses that do not take gender into account. Many of the studies used and developed democratic theory, theories on representation, theories of the state, social movement theory, gender/welfare regime theory, theories on Europeanization, and, most recently, theories on intersectionality. An important theoretical theme running throughout all of the studies is how to make democratic processes more open, inclusive and representative, with women's movements having great potential to make stable and new democracies more democratic.

#### **5. Comparative case-based analysis with a new focus on European countries outside of Western Europe**

The projects also share a cross-national perspective, in most instances using the selection of country cases as a means to sort through similarities and differences in outcomes and in determinants – in other words to test hypotheses about policy dynamics. Several studies explicitly adopt the comparative method or QCA in selecting the countries included in the study. Seven out of the nine studies focus uniquely on European countries – four of those include both Western and Eastern Europe, one includes only Western European countries and two focus primarily on Central, Eastern and South Eastern



Europe. Thus, important cross-national cultural differences between East and West are examined in some of the studies – with significant variation between the Central and Eastern European countries coming out as an important finding.

## **6. Analysis over time and space and across issues**

Time, space and issue are also important shared analytical lenses across all of the projects. All of the projects conducted research over the long haul to assess changes over time. The studies focused on the West tended to assess changes in policy and politics since the second wave of the women's movements, while the studies on Central and Eastern Europe started from the transition from communist to democratic regimes. MAGEEQ began its analysis at the height of the UN's women's policy process in 1995 to evaluate whether the Beijing process had any impact in Europe. Multi-level analyses are a part of all the studies to varying degrees given that seven studies deal with the EU and processes of Europeanization and mainstreaming at some level. Several studies included a sub-national level of analysis as well. Similarly, a focus on different issue areas is a part of most projects; in several, the same selection of issues was examined for all of countries in the study. Findings in some of the studies show there are important variations in political dynamics across different issue areas even within the same country.

## **7. Multi-methodological approaches with uniform methodological tools**

Although a formal mixed-methods approach is only used in one project (Cresswell, 2003), many of the studies combine several different approaches to research and analysis. All studies bring together on some level large 'n' analysis with country-based qualitative analyses and present both qualitative and quantitative results. There is an unusual intermingling of post-modern approaches related to feminist standpoint theory, interpretivism and social constructivism that avoid formal theory building with more 'empirical/neo-positivist' approaches that formally operationalize variables and test hypotheses.<sup>8</sup> In several of the studies, an explicit interdisciplinary approach is taken. Many of the studies follow a uniform method to collect data and present findings, often some form of process-tracing, with the analytical methods and data-collection protocol developed and agreed upon by the group.

## **Conclusion**

Although by no means a systematic assessment of all work in FCP on Europe, this analysis of nine recent projects and their common features provides an

opportunity to reflect about the state of current comparative gender and policy scholarship, particularly given that over 160 scholars in 27 countries have actively participated in the studies. In some ways, gender and comparative policy scholarship has not changed since the first formal assessments of FCP as an emerging field (for example, Mazur, 2002). Gender remains a fundamental category of the analysis; issues of patriarchy, gender-biased norms and the state are at the center of study designs; feminist and non-feminist theory continue to be operationalized in studies, and comparative theory building based on qualitative analysis is an important part of analysis. At the same time, there have been significant new developments reflected in these projects identified by other feminist policy scholars as well (for example, Beckwith, 2005; Squires, 2007).

Although not a pre-requisite, the creation of a large international research group is becoming more of the norm, as a reflection of shifting priorities of major government funding agencies and efforts to include a broader range of countries into comparative studies. One of the major features of FCP work in the past was that theorizing and analysis took a mid-range approach and a most similar systems design with theoretical propositions coming from studies only applying to Western post-industrial democracies. The argument was that other experts of non-Western countries would need to test the validity of the propositions about post-industrial democracies before any definitive statements about gender and politics could be made about the rest of the world. The inclusion of East Central and South Eastern European countries into the analytical purview of studies opens the door for the consideration of countries from outside of the West with different levels of economic and political development and cultural contexts. As a result, FCP is faced with a new level of cultural diversity and the need to rethink core analytical concepts to make them better ‘travel’ across cultural boundaries.<sup>9</sup> This new development may allow FCP analyses of Western countries to bridge the gap with a growing and rich body of comparative work on non-Western countries and research that analyzes trends across a broad range of regions of the world (for example, Rai, 2003; Howell and Mulligan, 2005; Htun and Weldon, 2008).

The analytical perspective of FCP has clearly gone beyond the nation-state to include a multi-level approach where the sub-national and extra-national levels are just as, if not more, important than the national level. Also, cultural differences must be placed in an intersectional perspective where race, ethnicity, class, religion and sexual orientation become important and fundamental considerations alongside gender. Time period and policy issue area have also become salient analytical dimensions when understanding the dynamics and determinants of gender and policy processes, perhaps even more important than nation-level trends and dynamics.



Normative and empirical questions of democracy have increasingly become a focal point of FCP studies; in terms of placing women's movements at the center of making the democratic process more democratic, and for the newer democracies in terms of effective transitions to democracy. An increasing emphasis on representation as a means to link issues of women's presence to policy outcomes in the FCP scholarship dovetails with comparative scholarship on women in politics, which is also taking a more systematic look at substantive representation and policy outcomes (for example, Celis and Childs, 2008). Thus, while in 2002, the work on women's political representation was identified as an adjacent area of research, today policy and representation research are becoming one and the same. Here too intersectional approaches are becoming essential; women's interests, movements and representation must be disaggregated and understood in terms of differences among women by religion, race, ethnicity, class and so on.

Methodological pluralism is also now a more pronounced attribute of feminist comparative policy work. Although much work is qualitative, emphasizing the importance of expert analyses of country cases and process tracing, studies are increasingly bringing in quantitative large 'n' analysis out of necessity, owing to the shift toward including more countries in study designs. An emerging part of the feminist approach is to more formally conceptualize and to develop specific data collection and analysis techniques, drawing from both feminist and non-feminist work. While earlier FCP studies tended to take a more 'empirical feminist approach' (Harding, 1987) where studies were designed to test hypotheses through empirical analysis without putting into question the scientific method, recent feminist research has brought in post-modern approaches based on feminist standpoint theory and social constructivism with a focus on framing, discourse and policy content and often a rejection of the scientific method (Hawkesworth, 2006).

This shift is not necessarily positive. On the one hand, the key issues of whether formal policies are effectively implemented to actually change gender relations in society are left relatively unexamined and on the other, an absence of clearly articulated hypotheses, formal concepts and findings may limit the broader empirical and applied messages of the studies. At the same time, the increased emphasis on connecting to public officials and citizens to research through dissemination and training, an emphasis brought in by a more post-modern approach, potentially outweighs these empirical gaps.

Identifying common trends in findings is still an open-ended question; awaiting a systematic meta-analysis of all current FCP work to try to develop propositions about gender, policy and the state that can be fine-tuned in future studies.<sup>10</sup> Indeed, the FCP projects reviewed in this paper do not directly build

from each other and have little direct intra-group communication except through a few individuals who are in several projects. Analyzing the results and common conclusions of all current FCP research has the potential to build a bridge among all of the studies and in so doing to allow FCP scholarship to more systematically contribute to theory building and the cumulation of knowledge.

One characteristic of FCP that has remained quite similar is the degree to which non-feminist policy studies and political science continue to ignore gender and policy research. Mainstream comparative politics and policy studies still do not integrate the findings of feminist scholarship in a meaningful way or bring gender, women's movements or women's representation in as an important aspect to be analyzed in comparative studies of democratic politics (Tripp, 2006). To be sure, there has been an increase in publications of gender research in non-feminist journals, including this special issue, but few non-feminist scholars have seriously gendered their own analysis beyond isolated cases or the more normal approach of 'add women and stir.'

In closing, as these nine projects show, FCP is a vibrant and successful field, which stands to make fundamental contributions to gendering political analysis, scholarly thinking on democracy and to the actual operation of democracy itself at the local, national and international levels. At the same time, there is still much progress to be made in overcoming scholarly resistance by non-feminist analysts and building from the lessons drawn from these projects in future studies through development of studies of policy implementation, extending the scope of analysis beyond Western democracies, and better integration of different feminist approaches. This reflection hopefully will contribute to this complex and exciting process to move the field forward.

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## Notes

- 1 For more on FCP as a field of study see Mazur (2002).
- 2 The cross-national perspective is by no means the norm in recent FCP studies. Many focus on one to three countries; for example, Zippell (2006), Rinker (Forthcoming), Lovenduski (2005a), Ortvals (2008), Chappell (2002), Mazur and Zwingel (2003), Ferree *et al* (2002), Morgan (2006) and Opello (2006).
- 3 Policy relevance is evaluated in terms of whether the networks link up with practitioners and activists involved with gender equality policies through, for example, dissemination of findings, training or research collaboration.
- 4 RNGS research and planning meetings have been funded by the European Science Foundation, the National Science Foundation, the French Ministry of Social Affairs, the Social and Economic Research Council, UK and various other national-level funding agencies for over 750 000 euros.
- 5 Following from the recent FCP work, women's movements and women's policy agencies are able to potentially represent women's interests within the state both 'substantively' and 'descriptively' (Pitkin, 1967). Here representation goes beyond elected office as the only potential sites of representation (Weldon, 2002; Beckwith, 2005).
- 6 In addition, RNGS researchers contributed to a book that sought to assess state feminism 10 years after the first book that launched the project (Outshoorn and Kantola, 2007).
- 7 For more VEIL findings on Austria, Germany and the Netherlands, see Birgit Sauer's paper in this special issue.
- 8 For more on different feminist approaches to research see Harding (1987) or Hawkesworth (2006).
- 9 For more on the importance of concept traveling in the construction of gender and politics concepts see Goertz and Mazur (2008).
- 10 Poteete and Ostrom's (2005) development of a large 'n' database from small 'n' studies on water collective action to manage natural resources in the United States provides a potential roadmap for the construction of a database on FCP scholarship.

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