Gender Equality Policies in Switzerland: Institutional Factors of Success and Failure. Introduction to the Special Issue

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1 Gender equality policies in Switzerland – need for more knowledge

Gender policies are based on a complex interplay between various and often contradictory patterns of interest in society and politics. This is likely to contribute to the fact that gender equality has only been partly realized in Switzerland and in other Western countries. Though numerous policy measures have been implemented in such fields as education, family and employment, gender equality is still a political issue. Gender-specific segregation in the educational system and on the labour market continues. In neither low nor more highly qualified ranks have women been able to attain the same success as men in terms of job position and wages, and gender stereotypes continue to affect the choice of education, training, and careers of young men and women.

Against this background, a detailed analysis of the impact and effectiveness of strategies and measures to promote gender equality seems of great importance. Also, policies and planning fields that do not explicitly target the promotion of gender equality do affect gender relations. Hence, the study of these policies might help to understand why previous gender equality efforts show only limited effectiveness. Switzerland's federalist structure draws special attention to cantonal and regional differences in gender inequalities and gender equality policies, as well as local experiences with different forms of implementation. To what extent have concepts, strategies, and measures taken by various actors since the 1980s proven themselves in educational and social institutions, in labour organizations or regional communities? Which are the complex causes of persisting gender inequalities? What are the major challenges to implementing gender equality policies in Swiss society?

In addition to the analysis of structural and institutional aspects of gender equality policies, the legitimization and argumentation patterns that lead to the success or failure of policy concepts and strategies are of great interest. Norms, discourses and

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cultural notions of equality and justice, both in society and organizations, play an important role in determining the need for action. Whether the issue is the needs and rights of girls and boys in the classroom, the promotion of women at work, or the reconciliation of work and private life, ideas and convictions concerning gender and gender relations are of great relevance. Important, of course, are also the influences of overarching structural and cultural conditions and circumstances on everyday gender (in-)equality practices of social actors, both women and men.

The National Research Program 60 on Gender Equality (www.nrp60.ch) is the first Swiss research program providing a systematic investigation of political action on gender equality.[1] It aims at delivering findings that will help to assess the effects of gender-equality policies and to identify the complex conditions of their success or failure. The completion of this programme in 2014 is a good occasion to take stock of the situation in Switzerland. The present special issue draws on some of the main results from this program as well as further, thematically related studies that address gender equality issues. The articles explore the influences of policies in core fields of gender (in-)equality, especially in the education system, the labour market and private households. Their identification of the complex political, institutional and socio-cultural factors as well as barriers to a successful gender equality policy will enhance our understanding in this field, and can also guide future policies.

The articles in this volume start from a variety of theoretical and methodological approaches but are all concerned in one way or the other with the impact of institutional environments and especially politics on gender relations. All articles, some more explicitly than others, tackle the question of how to assess the reproduction of gender inequalities. They stretch the concept of "doing gender" from microsocial (West and Zimmerman 1987) to institutional and therefore meso- and macrosocial dimensions. Institutional doing gender has specific effects in terms of unequal distribution of opportunities and constraints.

How then do social – and specifically political – institutions contribute to gender categorization? Krüger (2001; see also Levy 2013) proposes to distinguish three ways institutions can influence life courses and their gendering in contemporary Western societies: phasing, relating and supporting. *Phasing institutions* are those which individuals have to pass more or less compulsorily as for instance education, paid work, and retirement. These institutions define biographical phases in individual life courses, they control and sequence people's lives by defining specific biographical moments which do not necessarily coincide with people's chronological age. Phasing institutions are public institutions, which might be contested and might

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1   The preceding NRP 35, "Social and Legal Status of Women – Ways to Equality" did not have the same encompassing and policy-evaluating scope as the NRP 60. In other potentially relevant NRPs (e. g., 27, "Efficiency of Governmental Action," 29, "Changes of Life Style and Social Security," 40, "Violence in Daily Life and Organized Crime," 43, "Formation and Employment," or 51, "Social Integration and Social Exclusion"), gender issues were dealt with hardly more than marginally.

change over time, and they are themselves gendered. By sequencing life courses and by regulating the ways and extent to which individuals can acquire life-course relevant resources and use them in their biographical projects, phasing institutions have a series of gendered impacts on life courses. To the extent to which they convey gendered resources, such as specialized qualifications that are gender-typed, they also directly institutionalize gender differentiation.

Relating institutions link lives together, the most important in Western societies being the family. The family's function of life-linking does not only concern the adult partners of the couple, due to the simple fact that the relevant phases in the course of family life are currently defined by life transitions of the children (pre-school, school, post-school). Monogamy, heteronormativity and a clearly gendered division of labour in the modern male-breadwinner family have been institution-alized since the 19th century. The family also connects the market economy with state institutions. Moreover, the family is also a locus of social control and power, of the exercise of more or less clearly defined roles, of gendered labour division and respective socialisation, and of status inheritance.

Supporting institutions give support to individuals in solving biographical problems resulting from peoples' participation in more than one socially demanding field. A typical supporting institution is public child-care, which aims at combining involvement in family and paid work at a time. Supporting institutions, hence, might have the potential to overcome traditional gender roles and unequal gender relations. But their form might also reproduce inequalities, as studies on public child-care have sufficiently shown.

The three institutional types contribute to *direct* life-course institutionalization and to the gendering of people's life-courses. Moreover, institutions exist, which may have *indirect* and mostly unintended effects on gender relations. These may be called *background institutions*. Public and private services, shops, the health system, schools, public infrastructures such as transportation, are not geared in the first place to influence life courses and their gendering. However, these background institutions operate on the basis of implicit *assumptions of normalcy*, especially on hegemonic assumptions about femininity and masculinity and a more or less gender-biased family model. As these assumptions are embedded in institutional functioning, they have the character of a self-fulfilling prophecy that works not so much on the cultural than on the structural level of framing everyday life. Hence, these institutionalized assumptions about gender – embedded for instance in welfare state regulations – are guiding people's life-courses as well as everyday decisions. Those who wish or are forced to live according to a social model incoherent with the institutional assumptions of normalcy (e. g., by living as a single parent with a child, or by organizing family life and especially the familial division of labour in a non-gendered way) find it very difficult to do so.

2   About the articles

Policies aimed at combating gender-typical career decisions during adolescence have not been very successful – this is highlighted in the article by Imdorf, Sacchi, Wohlgemuth, Cortesi, and Schoch. Using data from the Swiss TREE youth panel study, they assess whether the cantonal education systems in Switzerland differ in the extent to which they structure individuals' transitions from school to work along gender lines. An important finding of their contribution is that education systems with higher vocational training rates (i. e. educational systems predominant in the Germanic world) have higher allocations of gender-typical educational, and thereby resulting in gender-typical labour-market careers. This is particularly true for men. Thus, vocational training programs (especially those aimed at male apprentices) are particularly gender segregated precisely because they are usually implemented at the upper secondary level, i. e. at an age when decisions are often taken along gender-specific lines.

Fassa, Rolle, and Storari study the changes that the notion of "equality" has undergone as a topic for education and action in the school system of the French-speaking cantons in Switzerland. Analysis of both consecutive official texts and of qualitative interviews with decision-makers and school actors shows that the equality issue has progressively become diluted into a more encompassing and vague discourse about diverse inequalities, gender inequalities being only one of those. The discursive shift from gender to diversity is paralleled by a conceptual drift from "equality" to "equity." This kind of discourse analysis cannot – and does not pretend to – directly reflect teachers' practice in the schoolroom and even less its effects on pupils. However, the fact that the analysis concerns documents strategically chosen for their structurally based performativity (i. e., for their officially binding status) gives this study its particular relevance.

The article by Leemann also deals with the challenges of implementing equal opportunities policies in the educational system on a cultural level. It focuses on the implementation of the so-called "National Daughters Day" in Switzerland, based on group discussions with school administrators as well as teaching staff of secondary schools in a Swiss canton. The theoretical framework of a "sociology of critique and justification" allows the author to reconstruct how schools deal with expectations of educational reforms and equal opportunity polities by referring to different "orders of justification." As frames of reference these justifications pro-vide the link between individual interpretations, "legitimate" societal notions, and contribute to the often quite ambiguous and limited realization of gender equality in everyday school practices.

Droz, Miéville-Ott, and Reysoo analyse gender differentiation on the conceptual and perceptive level in both the regulations governing the vocational training (VET) of people working in Swiss agriculture and among these people themselves using

focus groups. Their findings attest a strong and largely unquestioned remanence of horizontal as well as vertical gender differentiation in this little-studied industry where small, mostly family units of production dominate. The almost inexistent public awareness of unequal gender relations in agriculture might be explained in this study, as it shows a large, at least implicit consensus of an "asymmetric binome" in farming: the basic orientations of VET for young men and women in agriculture, on the one hand, and the latter's self-perception, on the other, are consistently built on taken-for-granted unequal gender stereotypes.

Epple, Gasser, Kersten, Nollert, and Schief analyse Swiss cantons with respect to what they call "gender time inequality." They define gender time inequality as the unequal distribution of time for paid labour, housework and family work between men and women. Their analysis is based on data from the Swiss Labour Force Survey. While Geneva, for example, is characterized by comparatively egalitarian use of working time between men and women, Uri shows a pattern of high gender time inequality. The aim of the article is to explain cantonal differences through cultural, economic and institutional factors linked to gender time inequality. The cross-cantonal comparative research is based on a Qualitative Comparative Analysis (QCA) in order to explain causal relations between time inequality and institutional factors such as social structure, economic differences among cantons, culture (such as gender ideology or family ideals) and politics (such as spending on social welfare). The article shows that traditionalism, an important feature of gender ideology, and cantonal spending on welfare are crucial for diminishing gender time inequality.

Bertschy, Walker, Baeriswyl, and Marti address an issue that has received a lot of attention in the past two decades in Switzerland: the gender wage gap. Their article analyses this topic with data from the Swiss TREE youth panel study and focuses on the gender wage gap at occupational entry level. The unexplained wage gap at entry level is still large, namely around 5–8% in 2004–2010. This study makes a valuable contribution to the literature on the wage gap in Switzerland by focusing on wage differences at the start of careers and also by using unique information on abilities (namely the PISA information in the TREE study).

Le Feuvre, Kuehni, Rosende, and Schoeni study the situation of female members of the labour force aged over 50. Based on statistical analysis and qualitative fieldwork about the human resource management in four large service companies in Switzerland, they show that, although this occupational activity corresponds to an official policy of "active ageing," it falls through the combination of criteria governing the really implemented policies of gender equality, as these target on the first part of women's careers and well-qualified women. Thus, ageing women workers – who are to a large part poorly qualified – find themselves caught in a contradiction or even double-bind: between the ideological encouragement and often also material need to remain in the work force on the one hand, and, on the other, between the factual gender discrimination underlying firms' HR politics and its ensuing discouragement.

Lanfranconi studies the conceptual reframing of equality in the context of gender policies and their official encouragement in companies. Her analysis reveals an increasing conceptual shift in human-resource management orientations from a human-rights-based equality argumentation towards a more returns-oriented reasoning. This shift transforms gender equality from the general goal as which it is posited by the Federal Constitution into a means, i. e., into one among many HR techniques geared towards optimizing the firm's benefit. Thus, gender equality becomes subordinate to the situational elements the firm management has to cope with, and it loses its constitutional status. Although strategically motivated (easier entry into private firms' practices), this shift can provide a rationale for practices that ignore or even reinforce gender inequalities.

The article by Nadai and Canonica addresses gendered meanings and consequences of the transformation of the welfare state labelled "activating state" and "social investment policies" in Switzerland. The research focuses on unemployment policies, claiming that this area is as crucial for gender equality as labour market policies. The article examines if recent practices of activating unemployed women are able to integrate women into the labour market and to compensate specific discriminations of women on the labour market. Grounded in the "capabilities approach" the article argues that a selective concentration on labour markets and the logic of social investment tends to reproduce gender inequalities between family, work and capabilities. The article is able to show that specific groups of unemployed women, for instance migrant women, are empowered by these measures to develop "internal capabilities" irrespective of integration into the Swiss labour force.

3   References

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