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Abstract

Gender mainstreaming (GM) has been on the agenda of organisations at various levels in Sweden and worldwide since the 1990s. Research has shown that GM is difficult to apply and has yet to be clearly defined, and additionally that organisations are uncertain about how to implement it. Research also suggests that the dominance of the new public management (NPM) approach within organisations has made GM work more challenging. In this article, we examine GM in a medium-sized Swedish municipality that is reorganising itself to become gender mainstreamed while introducing trust-based governance (TBG). This municipality provides a unique opportunity to study how GM is constructed in a municipality at the intersection of NPM and TBG. Applying a critical perspective, this article analyses documents from reorganisation based on Bacchi's (2009) policy analysis. The results demonstrate that GM is mainly translated into TBG-inspired practices and that efficiency becomes an overarching concept that entangles GM, TBG and NPM. GM becomes part of cultural change together with TBG, while NPM maintains its dominance in the structural change of the organisation.

Introduction

This paper explores a commonly asked question in theories of gender mainstreaming (GM): Why is it so difficult to introduce changes intended to promote gender equality? Gender mainstreaming is commonly adopted as a strategy throughout public administration systems to achieve the political and social goals of gender equality (Meyerson and Kolb 2000; Verloo 2005). As early as the 1990s, supranational organisations, such as the Nordic Council of Ministers, the Council of Europe, the World Bank, the International Labour Organisation (ILO) and the EU, introduced GM initiatives directed towards their respective constituencies. Many national governments have stated that GM will be a core element in their efforts to achieve gender equality, and Sweden has been a leading country in this respect (Verloo 2005). However, despite political consensus across different levels of government, GM has proved difficult to realise in practice, and the practice of equality policy is generally implemented at an exceptionally slow pace (OECD 2019; Pincus 2002).

One answer that research indicates is that neoliberal models of governance, such as new public management (NPM), present a challenge for realising GM (Alnebratt and Rönnblom 2016; Bacchi and Goodwin 2016; Hall 2012; Wittbom and Häyrén 2021). Another is that the meaning of GM is unclear and may mean different things in different contexts, making local translations difficult (Andersson 2018; Daly 2005). The third set of explanations - concerning the difficulties of introducing GM - addresses how the uncertainty also includes issues of *how* GM should be implemented (Eveline and Bacchi 2010; Calvo 2013; Sjöstedt Landén and Olofsdotter 2016). By analysing the reorganisation of

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a medium-sized Swedish municipality, which has the stated goal of creating a gender mainstreamed organisation and introducing a new governance paradigm, trust-based governance (TBG), we contribute to the existing research on GM by studying a unique case. Introducing TBG is described in policy documents as a means to further develop the governance and management of a municipality in a transition away from NPM models (Final project report 2019d: 7), the efficacy of which is increasingly being called into question (Forssell and Ivarsson Westerberg 2014).

This article analyses how GM is constructed at the intersection of NPM and TBG in a municipal reorganisation. We do this by executing a critical policy analysis inspired by Carol Bacchi (2009). In the next section, we present the background of GM, NPM and TBG. We then present the theoretical framework and the poststructural policy approach and provide a brief background to the reorganisation of a municipality. We then present the results of the analysis. In our conclusion, we discuss the relationship between GM, NPM and TBG as it unfolds in the policy documents.

Background: Gender Mainstreaming, New Public Management and Trust-Based Governance

GM is depicted in the literature as a transformative process that embeds gender equality in processes and policies and, by extension, into politics (Eveline and Bacchi 2010; Rees 2005). This is also expressed in the definition proposed by the Council of Europe, which is used as a general conception and states that GM is “the (re)organisation, improvement, development and evaluation of policy processes, so that a gender-equality perspective is incorporated in all policies, at all levels and at all stages by the actors normally involved in policy-making” (Council of Europe 2021). GM consequently does not exert any effect as a tool if there is no consensus as to what the implementation of GM should accomplish or whether GM is de-politicised concerning the work of gender equality and reduced to an administrative task in an organisation (Calvo 2013; Sjöstedt Landén and Olofsdotter 2016).

The concept of GM remains “fuzzy”, and it is unclear how to translate it into everyday practices within organisations and how to use it to enhance gender equality (Andersson 2018; Daly 2005). Verloo and Lombardo (2007) have pointed this out in relation to gender equality, suggesting that if there is no consensus on what gender equality means or should mean, there is a risk that it will be an “empty signifier” that can be filled with different meanings (Verloo and Lombardo, 2007).

The concept of GM has been disseminated across the globe and transformed by various local actors when adapted to different local contexts (Andersson 2018). The variation concerns the extent and goal of the strategy and *how* it should be implemented within organisations (Calvo 2013; Eveline and Bacchi 2010; Sjöstedt Landén and Olofsdotter 2016). This might be a reason why GM is often transformed into a NPM practice, which emphasises countability and measurability (Alnebratt and Rönnblom 2016; Andersson 2018; Callerstig 2014; Lindholm and Callerstig 2011; Rees 2005; Wittbom 2018).

NPM has been the dominant form of governance in Sweden and other Western countries, including within public administrative bodies, since the late 1980s and rests on market-based public administration, including markers such as productivity, efficiency, marketisation, measurability, cost awareness and profit (Hood 1991; Kettl 2000). The NPM approach is characterised by an emphasis on goal achievement (Alnebratt and Rönnblom 2016; Bacchi and Goodwin 2016; Hall 2012). When GM is implemented in an NPM setting, quantitative measures and checklists become important components of GM projects because they enable auditing, and this enables economic rather than political discourses on equality (Andersson 2018; Kantola and Squires 2012). The depoliticisation and gender blindness of NPM thus continues in GM or hinders the implementation of GM (Wittbom and Häyrén 2021). Also, Alnebratt and Rönnblom (2016) have argued that goal-orientated management is not suited for complex societal change that includes abstract problems, which is significant for the problems GM is often implemented to combat.

The critique of NPM as a hindrance to implementing GM is a part of a growing scepticism regarding NPM since market-based solutions have been proven to be unsuitable for all public activities (Forssell and Ivarsson Westerberg 2014; Miller and Rose 2008). Critics also assert that NPM hampers democratic processes and that the emphasis on efficiency and costs has been excessive (Lindsay, Osborne and Bond 2014; Osborne 2010). Some have also noted that NPM fails to create opportunities for fair working conditions and citizens' needs for services (Karlsson 2017), which we argue illustrates the lack of a gender-equality perspective. The loss of confidence in NPM has allowed new governance models, collectively known as post-NPM models (Funck and Karlsson 2018), to emerge; TBG is one such model.

In Sweden, the critique of NPM has resulted in a public inquiry, the aim of which is to propose a system of governance that does not contain the flaws inherent in NPM. The inquiry identified a need for a more holistic perspective on how professionals in the public sector meet citizens' complex and varied needs, which TBG is said to accomplish. In policy texts, TBG is described as aiming to widen NPM-based, narrow economic rationality to highlight equality of service for all citizens (SOU 2017:56). In this way, TBG aims to create governance systems that support this equal-service perspective. However, researchers (Bringselius 2018) have stressed how a new governance system must be developed based on a local context and culture.

Previous research defines TBG as a paradigm for increasing trust between people and creating organisational commitment (Nyhan 2000). Bringselius (2021) used the term "philosophy" to describe how TBG has trust as a guiding principle, with ambitions to create space in organisations for manoeuvres that focus on both structural and relational aspects. Bringselius (2018) argued that TBG builds on bodies of economic and sociological theory involving three main actors—the market, bureaucracy and professions—that must be in balance. Bringselius also argued that there are three main steering mechanisms in TBG: the market (price), hierarchy (authority) and trust. These arguments build on Adler (2001), who stated that hierarchy and the market can oppose trust and there is a need to emphasise trust more. Freidson's (2001) work is another building block in Bringselius's (2018) argument but brings in a focus on

professionals as a balance against marketisation and bureaucracy. Thus, TBG aims to achieve a balance between steering mechanisms in organisations by increasing the space for professionals to manoeuvre.

TBG is not introduced in a vacuum, the governance setting is characterized by NPM which makes it impossible to draw hard lines between TBG and NPM. This means that there are connections between TBG and NPM, but the former has a greater focus on professions, values and cultures. TBG can be summarised according to seven principles: 1) trust; 2) a citizen-based focus; 3) a holistic view; 4) space for professionals to manoeuvre; 5) supporting functions within public administration; 6) knowledge development, including continuous learning based on science and proven experience and 7) striving for openness by sharing information and welcoming and respecting criticism (SOU 2018: 47). Recently, two principles were added to adapt the TBG framework to government agencies at the national level, and Bringselius (2021) emphasised that principles can be added or that existing ones can be modified.

TBG is described as stressing that in line with an increased need for social welfare services, there is a need for new methods to create encounters between professionals and citizens via public activities. It is crucial to decrease the focus on measurements, goals and follow-ups, and it is necessary to introduce new means of managing and organising activities focusing on core activities and citizens' needs (Bringselius 2018). Thus, when GM is translated into TBG, it might open up a shift in the traditional economic discourse on NPM to a more focused discourse on equality. However, since TBG alters ways of managing and ways of working but still has the traits of NPM, whether GM is more easily introduced in a TBG system than in NPM has yet to be studied.

Analysing Change

Against this backdrop—the reorganisation of a municipality aiming at becoming gender mainstreamed and, at the same time, going “beyond” NPM towards TBG—we studied the policy-formulating phase to detect what GM is and can be. Departing from post-structural policy analysis, we perceive policy creation—or the lack of policy regarding certain issues—as an important political tool that requires analysis and discussion rather than as a matter taken for granted or neutral (Eveline and Bacchi 2010; Shore and Wright 1997).

We view policy as a means to define reality, consider it a component of the “doing” of social reality (Eveline and Bacchi 2010), and order behaviour that helps us identify the normative assumptions that underlie policies and examine how policy works to control political agendas (Shore and Wright 1997). Policy documents—in this case, documents about a reorganisation—arise out of particular contexts and encapsulate the entire history, culture or representation of the society that generated them. This means that policy lends a version of meaning to reality rather than reflecting an indisputable meaning (Dumont 1998; Eveline and Bacchi 2010). Therefore, as researchers, we not only analyse the solutions policies aim to achieve, we also critically search for the assumptions on which a problem formulation is based. This entails focusing on what is represented as the problem in a specific issue—in our case, the problems that the implementation of GM is supposed to solve. When analysing the problems that

GM are supposed to solve, we also pay attention to what remains unproblematised and whether it is possible to approach “the problem” in another way. We analysed the problem representation upon which the reorganisation rests and how GM is constructed via policy documents and about NPM and TBG. In total, the analysis is based on 27 policy documents, like investigations that precedes the decision of reorganisation and political decisions. We also analysed documents such as follow-ups and reports produced by different groups during the reorganisation and informal meeting minutes from the steering group in charge of the process. These documents are important for understanding the underlying assumptions behind the reorganisation and are crucial for understanding how GM is depicted as a solution to the underlying problem representations. In this way, we perceive the documents as texts, as they are important in understanding how ideas translate into working practices in a reorganisation. We see the quotations reproduced in this article as significant for what is expressed in the policy documents.

When using this method, Bacchi (2009) pointed to the possibility of identifying three interconnected and overlapping kinds of effects. First, there are the discursive effects that follow from the limits imposed on what can be said and who can say it, when and where and with what authority and what is left silent. Thus, “the problem representations and the discourses that frame them make it difficult to think differently” (Bacchi 2009: 16), closing off alternative ways and leaving them unexplored. By analysing the documents in the early policy-formulating phase, we can identify the discursive effects by paying attention to how the “fuzzy” concept of GM is filled with content.

The second effect is the subjectification effect, that is, how subjects and subjectivities are constituted in discourse. Discourses provide certain subject positions—stigmatising some and “exonerating others and keeping change within limits” (Bacchi 2009: 42). Since the material we analysed is rich in content, we detected the dominant way of thinking and reasoning in the reorganisation. This method helped us reveal how subjects and subjectivities are constituted (Bacchi 2009; Bacchi and Goodwin 2016) throughout the documents. This method draws our attention to dividing practices produced by the documents by, for example, the categorisations of unemployed versus employed or citizens with “complex problems” versus citizens without problems and how these can create groups in need of municipal support or not. We used this as a tool to identify the gendered, racialised and disabling structures that are embedded in the documents and, ultimately, the reorganisation that shapes the possibilities of lives and reinforces existing power relations.

Third, this method helps us pay attention to lived effects (i.e., the material impact of problem representations). This builds on the idea that policy representations of problems also materially affect our lives (Bacchi 2009). This deals with focusing on what is represented as “the problem” in a specific issue and on the common assumptions behind this specific representation of a problem. In this context, we pay attention to the taken-for-granted assumptions behind reorganisation. It is also a matter of analysing what remains unproblematised and whether it is possible to approach “the problem” in some other way. What is left unproblematised, we analysed through the recommendations of, for example, new working methods, decentralisation and

the need for new technology and more digitalisation produced by the documents. Through the use of different materials, we analysed the documents as policy texts and, in this way, detected how the municipality is an active participant in creating constructs, stereotypes and subject positions (cf. Bacchi 2009).

A Municipal Reorganisation: The Case Study

As with many Swedish municipalities, the one we analysed adopted the Council of European Municipalities and Region's declaration and presented a strategy for the systematic integration of a gender perspective into all of its daily activities. The municipality studied is medium-sized in terms of population, governed by a Social Democratic coalition and situated along the coastline in the middle of Sweden.

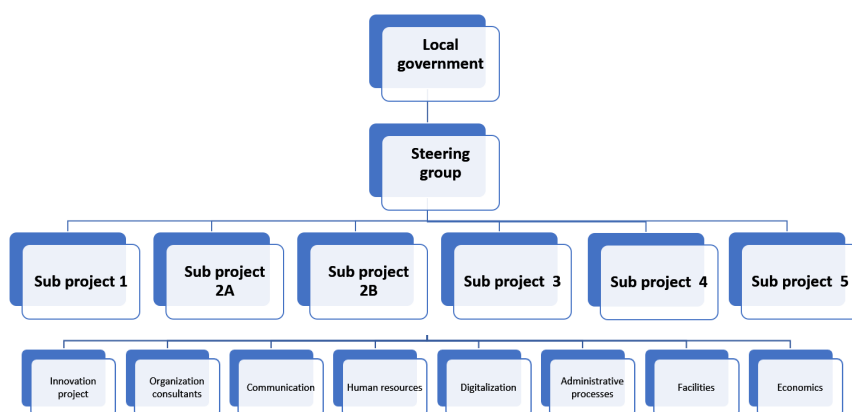
The Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions (SALAR), which organises and advocates for municipalities and regions, classifies a municipality as "larger cities and municipalities close by a larger city" (SKR 2016: 21) with over 50,000 inhabitants and with less than 200,000 inhabitants in the largest urban area. The municipalities in this group show population growth over a ten-year period (SKR 2016). This means that we define the municipality as a typical case (Gerring 2007).

In the study design, we followed the ongoing reorganisation, meaning it can also be interpreted as what Yin (2012) classified as a unique case; in other words, we have a unique opportunity to follow a process whereby a municipality introduces GM as part of a reorganisation.

Organisational changes concern the restructuring of two committees and associated administrations. Regarding activities within the previous social welfare committee and the labour market committee, adult education and integration are divided into two new committees. It was reorganised into a healthcare and social care committee, which is given responsibility for healthcare, support and social care. Also, a newly formed individual and labour market committee received responsibility for individual and family care, the labour market, adult education and refugee coordination.

The organisational change is considered as a large-scale reorganisation, with almost half of the municipality's employees working in various administrative bodies. To introduce changes within the administrative bodies, an overall project was formed with a steering group and subprojects that work to adapt the administrative bodies to the new political structure. The subprojects are linked to support resources, which include access to competence and resources from the municipality's activities, such as human resources innovation projects, organisational consultants, digitalisation, premises, finances, administrative processes and communication. Thus, the change involved numerous activities. An overview of the project's organisation is illustrated in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Overview of how the reorganisation with supporting resources is organised



No funds have been allocated for subprojects or overall reorganisation work, meaning that all staff within the administrative bodies participate via their ordinary working tasks. The initial preparatory phase ran for one year until the autumn of 2019. The second phase and launch of the reorganisation began in January 2020, and then the reorganisation work was transferred to the two newly created administrative bodies. At the same time, the overall project organisation was dissolved, aside from a few subprojects that remained as support to the new administrative bodies.

Results

Since the reorganisation set out to introduce a GM structure throughout the municipality, we wanted to understand how GM is constructed in relation to NPM and TBG. Following Bacchi (2009), since GM is presented as a solution, we began by analysing the problem representation behind the reorganisation and the underlying assumptions. The analysis revealed several problem representations, which is not unusual given the complexity of the policy documents (cf. Bacchi 2009).

It turns out that the reorganisation is based on the assumption of a series of ominous challenges presented as if they must be solved to avoid a dire future. One problem representation described in the documents is *demographic challenges*, which refers to an increasing group of citizens who will need the municipality's services. Another problem representation is *exclusion*, namely that the proportion of residents unable to support themselves is expected to increase, which will also increase the demand for municipal services. The third problem highlighted in the documents is the *supply of skills* in terms of sick-leave rates and staff-recruiting difficulties for the municipality's services. A narrative is constructed that claims that the structural changes presented by these three categories force the municipality to act to fulfil its statutory obligations. Thus, the narrative is formulated as an economic market model of demand for and supply of welfare services, where rising demands in volume and complexity

and less supply due to reduced staff are problems to which the reorganisation of the municipality is the solution via policy-formating documents.

In the next sections, we deconstruct how GM is discursively constructed. Inspired by Bacchi (2009), the analysis includes how GM is described, the subjectification effects of GM and what problem representations GM is supposed to solve.

Demographic challenges: handling volume with an efficient organisation

The demographically determined need for investment and initiatives will increase at a rate that is significantly faster than ever before and at a much faster rate than the labour supply. (Final project report 2017: 24)

The problem representation of demographic challenges is described as efficiency. The problem was constructed as a quantitative one of increased volume. In the documents, the demand for *municipal social care* is constructed as increasing more than the resources available, necessitating an improvement in organisational capacity (Final project report 2019d: 4). The reorganisation is expected to lead to more “efficient” resource utilisation by increasing productivity, wherein the inhabitants get “as much benefit as possible with the resources available” (Overall Project plan 2018c: 5). Thus, efficiency is linked to resources and finances; for example, “the committees’ activities must be characterised by high resource efficiency” (Project plan subproject 4 2019a: 4). This means that, in the documents, the relationship between demographic challenges and efficiency is solely constructed on the assumption that certain groups will increase in size and that people belonging to these groups have specific needs, “complex problems” and are at risk of exclusion, ruling out possible other scenarios. This creates a one-dimensional story about a possible future in which specific categories of people are subjected to a drain on the public purse.

Besides volume, the problem representation of increased demands for municipal social care is also defined as an increase in complex needs based on a reconstruction of citizens, which, unlike in the past, is now complex. A central component when demographic challenges are described is the need for a “new relationship” between residents needing support. Professionals within a municipal public administration are subjected to “alternative ways of working” (Final project report 2019d: 7). This is one way of translating GM into TBG because it adopts TBG’s work methods and takes a more holistic perspective on professionals in the public sector (cf. SOU 2017:56). This new way also has to be “efficient” and demonstrate how underlying assumptions of NPM influence reorganisation (Hood 1991; Kettl 2000). In the documents, the proposed solution is a transition to an integrated organisational structure, which is described as an “effective” approach for activities that serve clients with “multiple needs”. “There is a need to develop collaboration and coordination in complex cases to maintain coherence around the client’s overall situation and efforts” (Final project report subproject 2B 2019c: 20).

This means that the new reorganised administrative bodies will work in “teams” around individuals with “multiple problems” and “complex” cases

(Final project report subproject 2A 2019b: 9), in contrast to the earlier structure based on specialist areas.

...[it] means that there is a need for all professions involved in the activities, but they need to be coordinated differently than they are today, as the activities are currently organised based on specialist areas, which leads to a lot of handovers between units. The individual user's needs are therefore not being addressed in a coordinated manner. (Final project report 2019d: 13)

The documents also describe collaboration in relation to external actors, such as the Swedish Social Insurance Agency and the Swedish Public Employment Service (Overall project plan 2018c). This not only means that the administrative bodies must be reorganised but also alters the work that the new administrative bodies perform.

Evidence-based practice (EBP) and digitalisation are other components in the proposed solution to accomplish a more efficient and productive organisation that handles increased volumes faster and correctly, thus making it possible to achieve the goal of more efficient governance. EBP adheres to NPM that has dominated social work in recent years, which emphasises work practices based on scientific knowledge; however, it is limited by the fact that the “efficiency” and “results” of an activity must be measurable (Svensson et al. 2008). This often results in working methods wherein manual assessment and evaluation instruments are implemented in the field of social work (Liljegren and Parding 2010), hampering the influence of the profession. Thus, introducing TBG aims to increase the influence of the profession (Bringselius 2018).

References to and descriptions of GM are mainly absent in the problem representation of demographic challenges. The municipality’s GM strategy is only mentioned in the documents to define what it is and is referred to in a footnote. This means that GM is stated as a goal, but how it should be translated into everyday practice is unclear (cf. Andersson 2018; Daly 2005). Instead, the documents are suffused with the characteristics of NPM, wherein measurement and follow-up are important and the concept of efficiency is prioritised.

However, the documents state that “[...]it is not enough to simply change the organisation, redraw the lines, so to speak, attitudes and approaches must be fundamentally changed” (Final project report 2019d: 19). With a focus on citizens as the starting point, the activity will be viewed “from the individual’s perspective” (Project plan subproject 2B 2018b: 6).

Efficiency is a recurring theme in the text, an underlying assumption that current working practices are characterised by a lack of efficiency, which causes municipal employees to be subjects of change, to change their attitudes and approaches and thereby solve the problem with lacking efficiency. Still, the need for an increased focus on citizens (i.e., new ways of working, as described in the documents) is mainly intertwined with talk of efficiency and NPM-based instruments. The fact that efficiency is one of the most prominent features is also reflected in the support functions associated with the reorganisation, wherein there is competence in finance, HR, digitalisation and resources for change and

communication; however, staff with competence in GM are not included, although this competence is available within the municipality's organisation.

Exclusion: enhancing equality through geographical areas

Another problem of representation behind the reorganisation is exclusion, which focuses on the descriptions of citizens and the question of how to meet the increase in complex needs among them. Within the documents, exclusion refers to those who are not self-sufficient and who need support and assistance from the municipality:

The political parties note that more and more people, now and in the future, are falling into a zone of exclusion and a situation where, due to demographic trends, more children and young people, but especially the elderly, need support from the municipality. (Final project report 2019d: 4)

Although individuals' needs are the starting point for efforts, the documents contain constructions of groups of citizens with specific needs, such as young people with mental health problems and unemployed immigrants (Final project report 2017). These groups are considered people in need of support, which becomes a divisive practice and creates contrasts between nonimmigrants and those without mental health problems. These citizen groups are associated with specific residential areas:

"Unemployment, poverty, illness and low levels of education are primarily concentrated in six residential areas in the municipality" (Final project report 2017: 6).

This creates a problem formulation of exclusion, which produces a situation in which complexity is reduced to stereotypical descriptions of groups. It also creates a problem representation where people with potential needs living in areas other than the targeted, might not have their needs identified, as they are not subjected as a "targeted group".

The problem representation of exclusion preceded by the documents is the "lack of equality". Increasing equality and reducing exclusion are constructed as being linked to the introduction of GM in this reorganisation, wherein it is constructed to mean offering the same level of service to citizens as in other municipalities and according to the notion of how GM will create equality between different groups of citizens within the municipality (Final project report 2017). Here, GM is produced as a practice presumed to enable the municipality to better help residents by improving the match between their demands for municipal social care and the supply for which the municipality has a legal obligation to provide. This practice has the traits of TBG, which promotes a more holistic approach in which the equality of service to citizens is promoted (SOU 2017).

In the policy documents, this is described as being accomplished by reallocating resources to specific geographical areas and other ways of working within the new integrated organisational structure. Exclusion is linked to specific geographical areas or neighbourhoods within the municipality, where unemployment, poverty, poor health and low levels of education are mainly

concentrated in six residential areas in the municipality (Final project report 2018d).

The effect of the problem representation is that these neighbourhoods are constructed as problematic in the documents: “...it is essentially the same housing areas that have high ill-health rates, high unemployment, lower levels of education and more widespread poverty” (Final project report 2017: 35), and “exclusion is concentrated in certain residential areas” (Final project report 2017: 35). The impact goals, where GM is one of them, will be a solution to the exclusion by relocating municipal activities to these areas: “Another important starting point for the occupation is that it should be organised close to those it is for, i.e. in the geographical areas of the municipality” (Final project report 2019d: 13).

GM is translated in the documents into a working practice to equalise differences and inequality and thus becomes the solution to the problem of the representation of exclusion:

This means working for equality in activities, services and treatment, equality in the exercise of authority, equal distribution of resources and equal distribution of power and influence to all women and men, girls and boys, regardless of transgender identity or expression, ethnicity, religion or other beliefs, disability, sexual orientation or age. (Overall project plan 2018c p. 6)

This is based on the underlying assumption that increasing the presence of the municipality will create a “fairer distribution of resources” and be more “efficient” by capturing the need for support at an “earlier stage” (Overall project plan 2018c). Resources in the right place (areas) enable more efficient use of resources by identifying needs at an earlier stage and enabling a better (production) flow of citizens through the organisation.

As in the previous problem representation, GM is translated into TBG via a cultural change in the organisation, described as being carried out by individuals rather than by structural changes. Both citizens and municipal employees are considered responsible for working to achieve GM activities.

...given the fact that it [the reorganisation] will involve all employees and all citizens who receive assistance and support from the social services, which provides a great opportunity for many ‘carriers’ to drive the work forward according to the plan. (Final project report subproject 2A 2019b: 22)

In this manner, citizens in need of social services are positioned as those who carry the reorganisation and change forward. This reveals the view that the reorganisation should result in GM administrative bodies with values that are to be disseminated via those who utilise the administrative bodies’ services. In this case, it is possible to understand GM as having a central role (Alnebratt and Rönnblom 2016), as it must be carried out by both employees and clients; nonetheless, GM becomes more of an approach than a set of concrete measures.

The importance of translating GM into concrete tasks for public administration was emphasised by Lindberg et al. (2012) and Alnebratt and Rönnblom (2016), who highlighted that GM tends to disappear when implemented and the how is reduced to a question of the methods and tools used in a bureaucratic system. It is worth noting that quantity in terms of “all employees and all citizens” is defined as a guarantee for the successful implementation of GM rather than a concrete description of how to achieve it. As a consequence, GM becomes an “empty signifier” (Verloo and Lombardo 2007) that can be filled with meaning.

Skills supply by improved working conditions

The third problem representation that policy-formulating documents produce concerns municipal employees and efficiency. The understanding is that reduced sick leave, increased competence, simplified management and follow-up procedures can enhance efficiency in public administration (Final project report 2017). The problem representation of the need for improved working conditions produces notions of how high sick-leave rates and staff-recruiting difficulties reduce an organisation’s capacity to handle increased demand for municipal social care (Final project report 2019d).

The documents provide an understanding of how differences in sick-leave rates are connected to gender inequality and present a solution for improved working conditions by introducing GM. The effects of the problem representation are the fact that introducing GM can improve working conditions by adjusting workload, increasing managerial density, enhancing opportunities for competence development and improving working conditions in general (Overall project plan 2018c). However it is unclear how to accomplish this by introducing GM, as earlier research also identifies (Alnebratt and Rönnblom 2016; Andersson 2018).

More specifically, the documents construct gender-equal working conditions as a solution to the problem of high sick-leave rates. The documents state that women are overrepresented as municipal employees and that female-dominated work has high rates of sick leave. This means that the documents have the underlying assumption that by improving the working conditions of female-dominated work, gender-equal working conditions can be achieved. Research (Aronsson et al. 2019; Björk and Härenstam 2016; Forsberg Kankkunen 2014; Vänje 2015) has demonstrated that working conditions for employees and organisational prerequisites for managers are poorer in female-dominated workplaces, such as healthcare and social care, which contributes to higher sick-leave rates for women.

As we consider this, GM translates into TBG, and in this manner, there is an underlying critique of NPM-inspired management with a culture of auditing (Hall 2012). The solution is presented as improved working conditions, which are mainly described in terms of increased influence. This is to be achieved by changes in governance and leadership by introducing work methods based on TBG ideas.

...the new healthcare and social care administration is to be characterised by a focus on the user; they are organised in

inter-professional teams according to geographical areas, and management will be based on trust-based governance and management. (Final project report subproject 2A 2019b: 6)

This is in line with earlier research stating that NPM governance has worsened working conditions and sick-leave rates (Welander, Astvik and Isaksson 2019) and, above all, the lack of influence by professionals, which TBG wants to re-establish (Bringselius 2018).

In this context, management must take its starting point in TBG, wherein the term “management” is also emphasised as a subjectification. In the delegation’s report, TBG is described as a need for trust between all levels of an administration, and this trust starts from management and the levels below to have the proper conditions to be spread further in the delegation order. Management’s roles are to coach and create conditions for trust in the lower levels and to continue to have operational responsibility (Bringselius 2018).

The problem representation with high sick-leave statistics is also based on an underlying problem description: that there is a shortage of staffing, which is to be solved partly by reducing sick-leave rates and increasing efficiency. One way of increasing efficiency is to use new technology as a solution to labour shortage problems. Digitalisation is depicted as a means to become more efficient and modern but also to create gender-equal working conditions. Technical solutions are depicted as if they always increase efficiency, and the value of digitalisation and new technology permeates the documents without ever being problematised (see, e.g., Nyhlén and Gidlund 2021). In this context, new technology and digitalisation are presented as solutions associated with creating a modern public administration (Overall project plan 2018c), an administration that “in a systematically and thoughtful way, uses the possibilities of digitalisation” (Final project report, 2019d: 7). In this case, new technology is described as a means to become modern and create more gender-equal working conditions. As research has illustrated, GM is also associated with being or becoming modern (Daly 2005; Lindholm and Callerstig 2011). In this case, modernity is connected to digitalisation and not to GM itself.

When GM is translated into new technology, this technology and digitalisation are described as if it will invariably lead to increased efficiency that permeates GM. This is also reinforced when efficiency is reduced to a NPM discourse that emphasises measurability. We see evidence of this in the documents in that there is a description of how efficiency should be measured rather than what is to be achieved. One example of how GM reduces underlying assumptions about NPM is when gender equality is translated into salaries.

Gender equality is measured based on salary levels compared to the country as a whole, a compensation survey and sick-leave figures compared to the average for the country’s municipalities as well as employee surveys for 2019 and 2021 (leadership, opportunities for influence, development opportunities, satisfaction/well-being, expertise, stress level and work climate). (Overall project plan 2018c: 8)

As stated by previous research (Alnebratt and Rönnblom 2016), this presents a risk that gender equality will become “that which is measured” (34). We argue that norms and culture cannot truly be measured, making equality more difficult to achieve.

Discussion

In our analysis, we note how the reorganisation of the municipality into becoming gender mainstreamed is characterised by both structural and cultural transformation, which, according to previous research, is necessary for realising GM (Squires 2005; Wittbom 2018). However, the realisation of GM is challenged by how these two transformations are constructed as parallel rather than as an integrated transformation of the organisation, in which NPM is associated with structural change and TBG is related to cultural change.

The novelty of this study is that it shows how GM is present throughout the documents but most often translated into TBG-inspired practices. It is possible to say that GM is an empty signifier (Verloo and Lombardo 2007) that is filled with work practices that are TBG inspired, while still having NPM traits. It becomes a perspective and practice for employees and citizens to carry rather than an organisational matter.

By looking through the documents to track GM’s construction, our analysis suggests that GM is mainly translated into TBG-inspired practices. As GM is translated into TBG, it is (in the documents) constructed as something beyond NPM but is still to be followed up on and measured according to NPM. As Wittbom and Häyrén (2021) pointed out, this poses a risk that GM will get stuck in old understandings of efficiency since there is no change in how efficiency and value are measured. We argue that qualitative measures need to be developed for the value of GM (and TBG) to become visible.

Throughout the documents, efficiency becomes an overarching concept that entangles GM, TBG and NPM. The reorganisation is constructed as an economic model of supply of and demand for municipal social care, and GM is presented as a concept that is supposed to solve the problem representations of demographic challenges, exclusion and supply of skills. However, at the same time, GM becomes a dividing practice that produces subject categories of immigrants and non-immigrants, employed and non-employed, etc.

The introduction of GM, when translated into TBG, goes beyond NPM by opening up the political discourse on equality and equal service. Still, introducing GM (and TBG) does not reconstruct the economic rationality of NPM. This study provides knowledge on how GM and TBG together become part of cultural change, while NPM maintains its dominance in the structural change of the organisation. The fact that cultural change is defined as necessary for new ways of measuring efficiency opens up a possible transformation of the economic rationality of NPM, yet there is still old wine in a new bottle.

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