

Why does the Committee on Gender Equality not Gender Mainstream Legislation?

Exploring why a legislative committee does not use a seemingly strong parliamentary tool.

A few years ago the Danish Parliament, the Folketing decided to set up a legislative committee for gender equality (LIU). In doing so, the Folketing designed a new institutional structure in line with recommendations made by the emerging field of feminist scholarly literature which suggests that parliamentary institutions may strengthen women substantive representation in several ways. Not least by increasing gender mainstreaming in Parliament (Sawer, Palmieri, & Freidenvall, 2013). So far, however, LIU has apparently not tried to gender mainstream legislation in any way. This is rather surprising since the possibility to gender mainstream legislation is among the official tools of the committee. Moreover, another committee, the Committee on Rural Districts and Islands (ULØ), which was set up at the same time as LIU and has analogous tools seems to have been very effective in applying the perspective of the rural districts to legislation (doing what may be termed “rural mainstreaming”). Applying feminist institutionalism, this paper discusses why ULØ has succeeded in doing what LIU has not. In doing so, the paper illustrates how formal institutions may have unintended consequences. Also, it discusses the concepts of critical actors and points to the importance of institutional remembrance.

Author:

Mette Marie Stæhr Harder

PhD.student

University of Rokilde, Denmark

mmharder@ruc.dk