

# 3. CONCEPTS AND THEORIES

## The EuroFEM Framework for Local and Regional Development

There is nothing as practical as a good theory. It helps to gather, analyse and interpret information and even guide action. Above all theory helps us to understand issues, explain action, make sense of the world around us and build frameworks for action. Unfortunately, there is no holistic theory for mobilising women into local and regional development. A holistic frame of reference is still waiting to be constructed. There is, however, a vast pool of concepts and bits of theories which can be used in the construction of an appropriate approach to our subject.

We have chosen to build a framework from three different domains: the tradition of collaborative planning and governance; empowerment evaluation; and multidisciplinary women's studies or feminist research. They all contribute to the potential enhancement of mobilising women, which feminist research would call mainstreaming local and regional development.

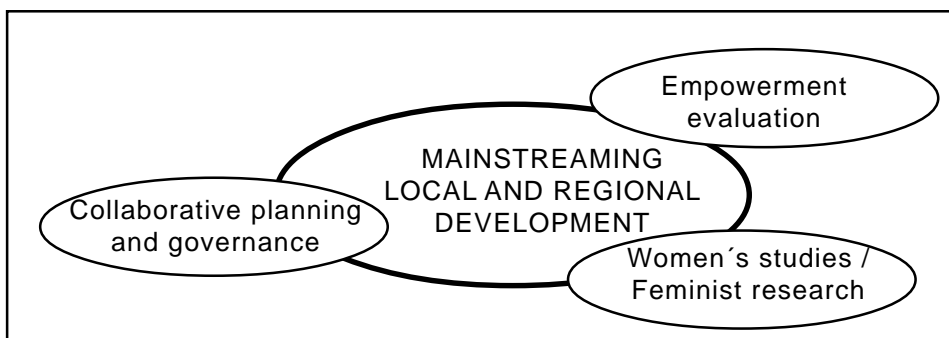


Figure 1. The frame of reference for mobilising women into local and regional development

Patsy Healey has written extensively about **inclusive collaborative planning and governance**. She points out that the negative consequences of globalisation of markets may be fought by gathering all local actors into a collaborative endeavour, where new and innovative solutions can be created. The approach means that the interests of everyday life and business may interact in a new way. This arena of communication makes it possible to create strategies of governance, which strive to integrate spatial, social, economic and environmental processes of the locality or region. Collaborative planning requires a set of enabling tools which allows young and old, women and men to take part in the developmental dialogue and in the creation of a new supportive infrastructure and culture for everyday life. It provides a theoretical basis for ways of working and decision making.

**Empowerment evaluation** is an approach to assessment which invites participants to evaluate themselves and their projects. It is based on the assumption that empowering processes, such as attempts to gain control, obtain resources and critically understand one's social and physical environment, may have favourable outcomes on both individual, institutional and social level. Empowerment evaluation is designed to help people help themselves and improve their projects by using forms of self-evaluation and reflection in pre-designed learning situations. Thus it is close to community capacity building. This type of evaluation, which focuses on the developmental process (formative evaluation) as well as on the results and impact (summative evaluation) is a major tool for managing the project or programme. Empowerment evaluation is a theory and a method which allows us to reflect on the development of our organisations and projects. This theory fits comfortably with the notions of the reflective practitioner and learning organisation.

Feminism is characterised, according to Anna Wahl, by two dimensions: the awareness of the inequalities of the gender system and the pursuit for equal conditions for women and men (Wahl, forthcoming). **Feminist research** describes, analyses and interprets information about the conditions of women and men in society. It also strives to produce concepts and theories which may help to transform the gender system. Feminist research is linked to politics and ideology through its connections with women's movements which both try to change unequal conditions and to envision how the world should look like. Feminist research validates and values individual experience of everyday life and embraces both qualitative and quantitative analysis. It also allows the researcher to establish a personal relationship with the research subject.

Feminism has influenced equality and equality politics. However, **equality and equality politics** are time and space dependent phenomena. Seen through the lenses of feminist research three historical waves of perspectives or approaches to equality can be distinguished, which continue to influence ideas and action in parallel (See Figure 2):

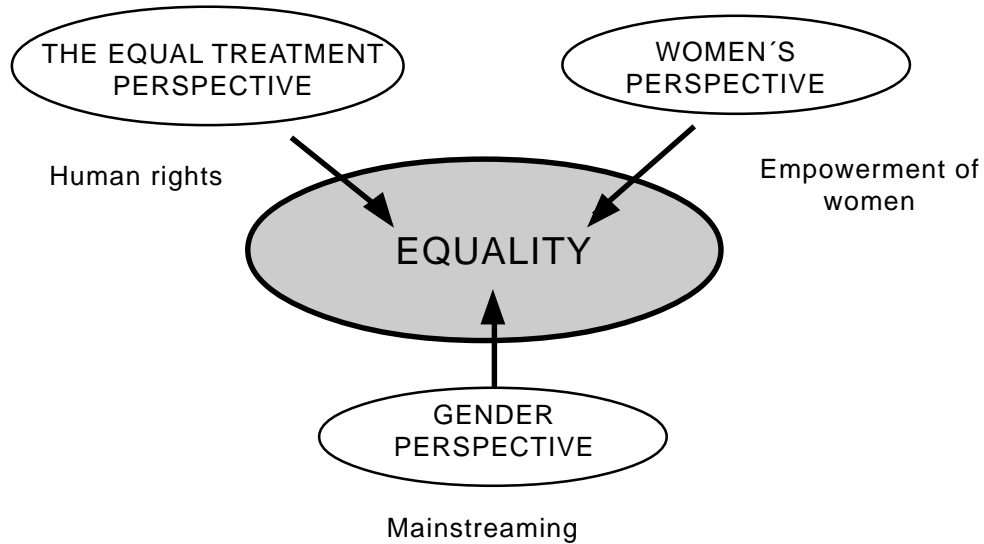


Figure 2. The three perspectives to equality which continue to influence approaches to equality.

1. wave (1789/1890 -) THE PERSPECTIVE OF EQUAL TREATMENT

Strategy: politics of human rights, same rights and obligations

Aim: equality of access and participation

The norm: male, sameness

Metaphor: fairness

Concept of knowledge: objective and expert based, universalistic truths

State response: women's suffrage, legislation

Gender contract: "housewife" - "women's social motherhood", "equality contract"

2. wave (1960 -) THE WOMEN'S PERSPECTIVE

Strategy: empowerment of women, women specificity, politics of sexuality, positive action

Aim: equality of outcome

The norm: female, difference

Metaphor: creative diversity, joy

Concept of knowledge: subjective, experiential

State response: legislation, forms of welfare societies, women specialists

Gender contract: "equal worth contract", "wage-worker motherhood"

3. wave (1980 -) THE GENDER PERSPECTIVE

Strategy : gender (equality) mainstreaming, relationships between men and women, the gender system

Aim : equality of condition, equal valuation of difference

The norm: fuzzy sexual norms

Metaphor: multiplicity of femininities and masculinities, mobilising diversity

Concept of knowledge: pragmatic, socially constructed

State response: splitting of the welfare state, mainstreaming efforts, business case for equal opportunities, changing workplace cultures.

Gender contract: to be negotiated

In different cultural contexts across Europe these three perspectives continue to overlap currently, although the strategies, aims, norms, metaphors, and concepts of knowledge vary. For example, the UN Platform for Action of the Beijing Conference puts forward the three strategies of human rights, empowerment of women and gender mainstreaming. They are all pushing the drive for equality.

**Response of the states** to women's claims has evolved according to specific political and cultural contexts from non-existent rights to full political rights, equality legislation and the creation of varying forms of welfare societies. The **gender contract** refers to a set of underlying values and rules, which govern the relations and conditions of women and men and the distribution of their actions. Liisa Rantalaiho (1997) states that the gender contract has evolved, for instance in the Scandinavian countries from the housemother contract into that of wage-worker motherhood which, however, implies that women are paid less than men and they work in lower positions. The current gender contract has to be renegotiated, because of the massive socio-economic changes taking place both on the global and local level.

In the 1990s there has been a shift of interest from a focus on women's issues to embrace a broader examination of the relationships between the sexes in society. The latter can be tapped by the concept 'gender system'. The **gender system** consists of many interconnected elements produced by a set of processes i.e. activities of women and men in their daily life which can be studied as concrete practices. These processes take place within the individual, as interaction between individuals, on the symbolic and structural level.

We have chosen to apply an open gender perspective in this toolkit. Its main strategy is mainstreaming gender into local and regional development. **Mainstreaming gender equality** challenges the unbalanced status quo. It implies the reorganising, improving and changing development and its results so that women and men can benefit equally from them. Mainstreaming goes hand in hand with the other key equality strategies: **the human rights and empowerment of women**. The latter means specific support to women and men who are in a subordinated position.

When gender equality is mainstreamed into local and regional development the following principles have been found to be useful:

- diagnosis of the threats and opportunities of "glocalisation" i.e. the tension between the globalisation of markets and the new rise of localities and their consequences for women and men
- creation of a viable vision from which objectives can be drawn (cf. our visionary model in Figure 3).
- choice of gender sensitive strategies
- application of feminist planning concepts, such as the creation of infrastructure for everyday life, and global actor analysis
- managing and nurturing developmental collaborative processes by using enabling tools, such as networking methods and creative workshops.

The visionary model in Figure 3 is our view of the global - local situation and the desirable vision for change by using various mainstreaming methods which might break gendered practices and create new supportive infrastructures even for the young and the elderly. Therefore, we have enlarged equality to include age, social class and ethnicity. The model has to be complemented by appropriate strategies and methods of which the toolkit offers several options.

Reference:

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- Healey, P. (1997) Collaborative Planning. Shaping Places in Fragmented Societies. London: McMillan Press.
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- Wahl, A. (Forthcoming) The Cloud. Signs.

## CONTEXT OF GLOCALISATION

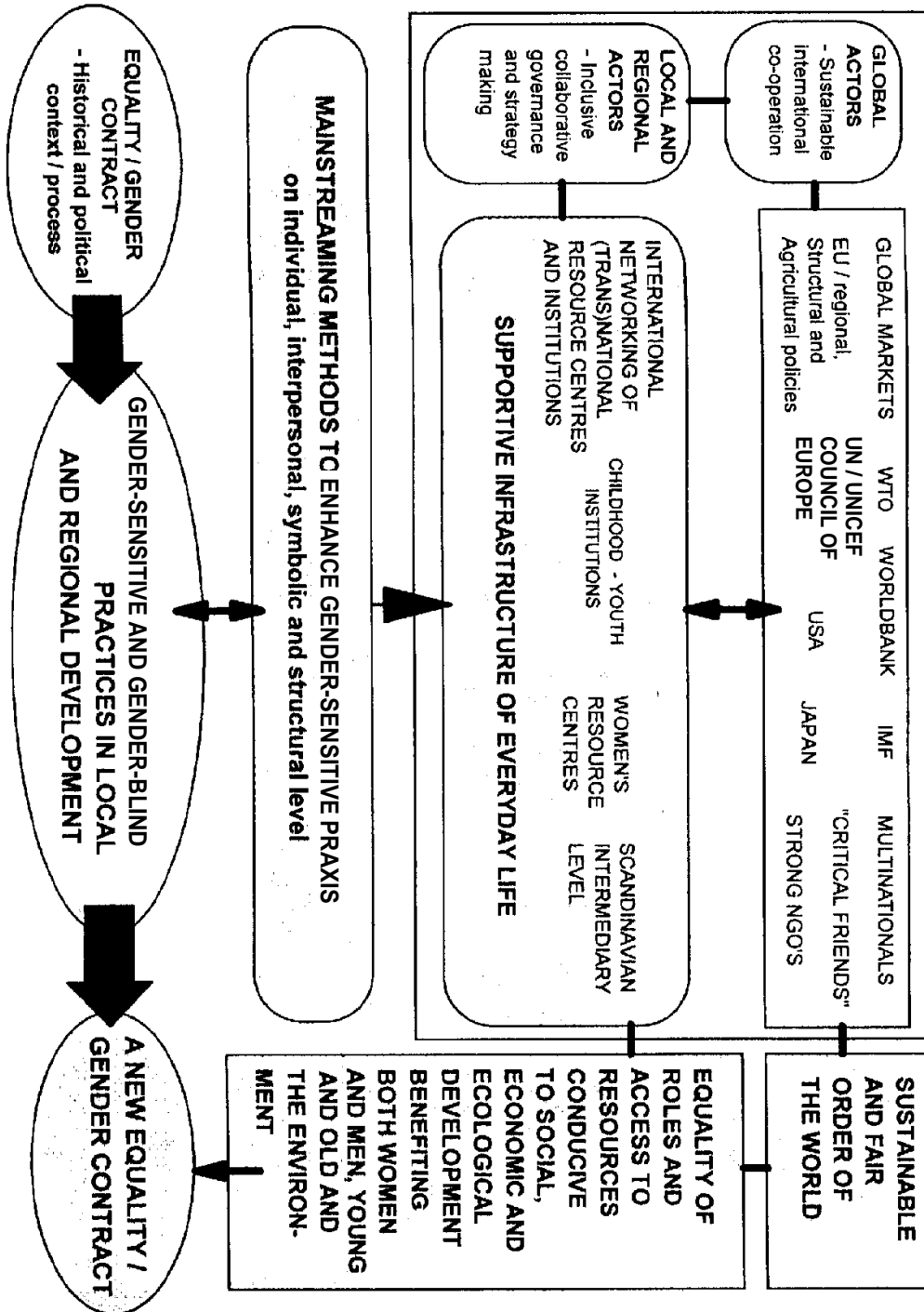


Figure 3. The visionary model for mainstreaming gender and intergenerational equality into local and regional development.

## Looking through the window of everyday life

The concept of everyday life is central to the research undertaken by the EuroFEM team. It is a critique of current ways of thinking, in particular:

- the functionalist tradition of urban planning and policies
- the gaps in representational democracy such that many voices are not heard
- the inability of centralised solutions to solve everyday life
- the narrow definition of “work” such that the unpaid work of caring is not valued by society

The New Everyday Life project (a Scandinavian women’s concept born in the early 1980s) is more than a theory or a critique. It is also a vision of a more harmonious society in which people are at the centre of all concerns rather than the pursuit of the quick economic fix. Finally, it is a model of action for reorganising the basic tasks of daily life in neighbourhoods in a more integrated way.

The central concept of the New Everyday Life project is the intermediary level that is a structure somewhere between the public sector, the private sector and the household (Figure 4.). Its function is to take up the many everyday tasks, which are currently scattered in space, to the local environment. Some examples can make this clearer: in the Scandinavian co-housing projects child-care and domestic chores can be

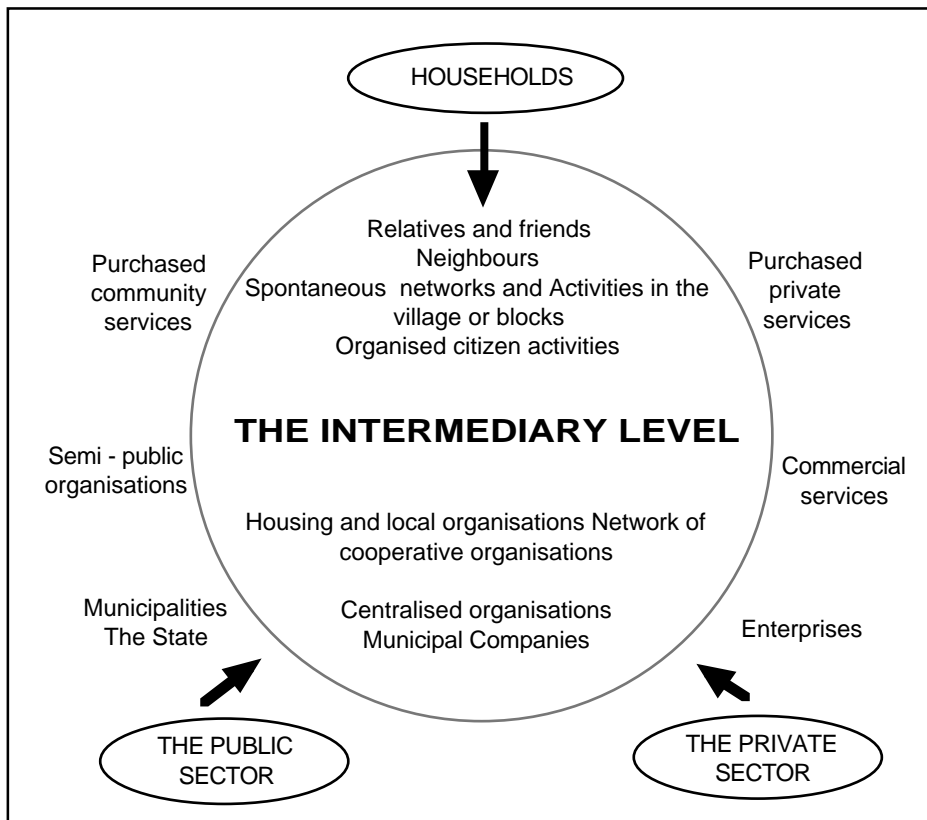


Figure 4. The Intermediary level is a new functional, economic, organisational and cultural structure between the private household and the public life.

shared between householders. In more conventional neighbourhoods, the care of frail older people can be done in a neighbourhood facility enabling the older person to remain in contact with their known surroundings and creating easier contact with friends and family. This vision is not just about care. Working at the neighbourhood level there are possibilities of neighbours developing a food co-op or a Labour Exchange and Transfer Scheme. Essentially the New Everyday Life project explores new ways of delivering services and infrastructure for everyday life in a local context.

Much of the EuroFEM research has been pondering the question: how can we build an infrastructure for everyday life? The place to begin is to determine how everyday tasks are being currently undertaken and at what costs in terms of finance and time. Can these tasks be approached in a different way? Are there tasks done by individuals which could be done collectively with no loss of quality or time? Are there issues which we would like to tackle such as after school care for children, which we could tackle as a group of neighbours or as a residents association or some other grouping. Are there tasks which we could organise and share between us or would we want to pay someone to carry these out for us? How we manage everyday life is an issue which we all have to grapple with and the solutions are different for different societies. It would be more difficult for the collective solution, suggested by Scandinavian women, to take root in countries, where the concept of individuality is deeply rooted.

Two useful examples demonstrate how different cultures can deal with the everyday life issue. In the Scandinavian co-housing schemes, laundry is undertaken in a communal laundry room. Depending on the ethos of the co-house laundry a rota is made and everyone undertakes laundry duties, in other houses everyone will do their own laundry but using the machines in rotation. By way of contrast, in a social housing complex in the United States, a long disused laundry room was brought back into use by a group of women who set up the laundry as a small business. Other residents paid to leave their laundry and have it washed. Profits from the scheme were ploughed back into the housing complex and benefited all residents from children to older people. These examples provide two different approaches, appropriate to their own cultural context.

Recently, the European Union has financially supported the creation and networking of local and regional resource centres for women. Women's resource centres can also be considered as a kind of intermediary level since they create supportive structures for women to integrate family life, community work and employment ( see the model in Figure 4 ). For instance, the Kokkola women's resource centre ( Figure 17 ) offers several opportunities for women to get involved either with employment, entrepreneurship or with the development of the region.

Sweden has a National Resource Centre which supports the regional or local resource centres located in the various Counties of Sweden. Recife is an example of an EU funded transnational network of resource centres consisting of organisations in Sardinia (IFOLD), Canary Islands (Istituto de la Mujer), Navarra (BIC), Paris (CNDIFF), Milan (Regione Lombardia), Lisbon (SEIES) and Women Entrepreneurs in Joensuu, Finland. The objectives of such an international network of resource centres is to promote the integration of women into economic and social life, to enhance the transnational communication of peripheral regions in Europe, and to have an impact on the European policy of regional development.

Reference:

Horelli, L. – Vepsä, K. (1994) In Search of Supportive Structures for Everyday Life. In I. Altman and A. Churchman (Eds) Women and the Environment. Human Behaviour and Environment, Vol.13. New York: Plenum.

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