

# Action Research and Learning: Gender Mainstreaming and the Media

## Studienrichtung:

Media and Communication; Institut für Publizistik- und Kommunikationswissenschaft

## Lehrende:

DDr. phil. et iur. Krisztina Rozgonyi MBA

## Lehrveranstaltung:

220031-2 PS Forschungspraxis (FOPRAX)

## Externe Kooperationspartner\*innen:

Stadt Wien Dezernat für Gender Mainstreaming – Dr. Ursula Bauer

## Ziele der Kooperation:

The aim of the Action Research Project is twofold:

1. What is the usefulness of Gender Mainstreaming as a concept and what are the lessons to be learned from the City of Vienna? (Research Question 1)
2. How could these lessons be interpreted within the context of the media? Taking action: critically assessing and planning possible interventions on gender mainstreaming in the media. (Research Question 2)

## Lernziele für Studierende:

1. Critically assessing and planning possible interventions on Gender Mainstreaming in the media.
2. Identifying with a potential role as socially responsive media professionals as change agents.
3. Conceptualizing, designing and implementing complex research projects.
4. Strengthening of methodological and academic writing skills.

## Inhalte:

- a. Research on Gender Mainstreaming at the City of Vienna, in cooperation with the Dezernat for Gender Mainstreaming.  
**Deliverables (group assignments):** field reports and/or interviews (written and/or audio (podcasts)/audiovisual (video) reports) on agreed case studies, published in form as blog entries on the '[LET'S TALK EQUAL](#)' platform.
- b. Interpreting research results and formulating action proposals on possible interventions on Gender Mainstreaming in the media.  
**Deliverables (individual assignments):** action proposals incorporating theoretical concepts (literature review), in blog entry on addressing gender (in)equalities in and by the media in form as blog entry on the '[LET'S TALK EQUAL](#)' platform.

In answer to the first call (RQ1), students were organized during the semester in five different groups and investigated the following areas and according to their specific inquiry:

### Group 1:

#### **Challenging gender stereotypes in the Kindergarten: policy measures by the City of Vienna**

The students applied a mix of methods including document analysis, expert interviews with Eva Reznicek (head of the department of internal organisation and strategy for the City of Vienna kindergartens) and Ilse Appel (head of a kindergarten) as well as an observation in a kindergarten in the 15th district in answering their research question. Their findings were presented in a [report](#) accompanied by interview records ([Eva Reznicek über Wiener Kindergärten und](#)



Geschlechtergerechtigkeit; Ilse Appel: Leiterin eines genderneutralen Kindergartens im Gespräch) and visuals documenting their field research.

They revealed the various schemes utilized by the City of Vienna to overcome gender stereotypes in kindergartens. The interior space design, the selection of playing materials aimed to deconstruct dominant gender distinctions and allow children to develop their identity were crucial elements of the policy. Moreover, they have exposed organizational efforts in the professional development of kindergarten teachers addressing gendered matters of early childhood education and attempts at recruiting more men to the teacher's cohort.

#### **Group 2:**

##### **Safety and the perception of security at public transport: gendered policy measures of the City of Vienna**

After careful theoretical considerations, the students conducted expert interviews with Martina Steiner, Head of the 24-hour Women's Emergency Hotline and Franz Broneder, Head of the Department for Prevention and Security Issues at Wiener Linien. They familiarized with the background and the details of the gender equality policy measures of the City of Vienna.

Furthermore, they surveyed young women aged 18–23, mainly students, living in Vienna about their experiences and perceptions of safety using public transport in Vienna. Their research report showcased the numerous precautions in place in Vienna to ensure safety, especially for women. However, it also shed light to the shortcomings of those measures due to lacking awareness among the target group and more specifically to the hindrances women faced once actually in need for making use of dedicated safety buttons thus the limited perception of safety.

#### **Group 3:**

##### **Gender Mainstreaming & Urban Planning: the case of *Neubaugasse* and *Seestadt Aspern***

This research project focused on the impact, thus the success of Gender Mainstreaming at two major and recent urban planning projects of the City of Vienna. Based on a throughout literature review and document analyses, expert interviews Dipl.-Ing.in Eva Kail with urban planning specialists at the City of Vienna provided a nuanced picture about gendered urban planning methods. The field observations documented by videos and field notes exhibited the complex challenges to mainstreaming gender to the everyday experience of people walking on the streets of Vienna and realizing a transforming environment.

Moreover, they revealed the consequences of the existence of "Angsträume", specific abandoned places, bearing with the perception of fear, especially to women living in close vicinity. The lack of appreciation by the inhabitants limited the success of the policy interventions. Again, awareness and understanding proved to create the main barriers to engagement with transformations.

#### **Group 4:**

##### **Community spaces (public parks) and Gender Mainstreaming**

This project aimed at analysing the implementation and impact of the City of Vienna's endeavours for gender-equal city life, studying two major public parks in Vienna, namely the „Währinger Park“ and the „Parkanlage Prater“. The group first looked at urban planning policy and methods and conducted three expert interviews with employees of the MA13 (Renate Kraft and Katharina Röggl) and the MA42 (Ursula Dominikus). Furthermore, they observed on the field the actual conditions of women's access to and possibilities of enjoying public open spaces at the Währinger Park and the Wiener Prater/Praterallee documented by videos and field notes. The participatory planning methods applied by the City of Vienna of social space analyses revealed the specific needs of young women subject to strict social control. Young women and girls needed bright retreat spaces in the parks to avoid being observed and controlled by their families.

Moreover, girls in the age of 12 to 14 years often had to look after their younger siblings in the parks and therefore could make less use of the activities on offer. Thus, the NGO Juvivo Association was mandated to offer for appropriate childcare of the younger siblings so their sisters could enjoy



recreation at the parks. The profound impact of the social context, the deprivation of the neighbourhood created severe limitations on policy and action.

#### **Group 5:**

#### **Gender-neutral language policy of the City of Vienna in internal and external communication**

The research project examined how the City of Vienna implemented gender-sensitive language policy with a mainstreaming approach within its own internal and external communication. After review of the relevant policy documents (Leitfaden für geschlechtergerechtes Formulieren und eine diskriminierungsfreie Bildsprache 2011), two expert interviews with Ursula Bauer, the Head of the Department for Gender Mainstreaming of the City of Vienna, and Eva Gassner, media spokesperson for the City of Vienna helped to draw an overall picture on the implementation of the policy. Next, a quantitative content analysis of the press releases of the City of Vienna and qualitative analysis of the accompanying visuals was conducted, contrasting the findings with the guidelines for the gender-sensitive language. The results exposed only slightly more than 50 per cent of the press releases of consequent use of gender-sensitive language. They concluded with recommending actions for further alignment with policy objectives.

In conclusion, the research project added several insights and critical analyses on the usefulness of the gender mainstreaming concept and method. The dedicated use of gender statistics (Geschlechterverhältnissen bei der Parkbetreuung) and analyses (Sozialraumanalysen), gender sensitisation training e.g. of kindergarten teachers, as well as gender-sensitive stakeholder consultations („Sag’s Wien“ App) proved to contribute to the success of policy interventions. However, the lack of (gendered) awareness among target groups and audiences posed acute limitations to several efforts. The learnings on the vast array of mainstream practices bear with further theoretical relevance to the study of gender equality measures.

#### **„Doing Gender’: action proposals on mainstreaming methods learned in the media industries**

Students were further invited to individual action proposals on possible interventions on gender mainstreaming addressing gender (in)equalities in and by the media in form as blog entries. The students had to answer the following questions:

1. Understanding the fundamental concepts of Gender Mainstreaming and its relevance to media  
What are the lessons learned from the City of Vienna?  
What are the common issues with regards to inequalities in and by the media?
2. Conceptualizing, designing and implementing gender equality actions  
What is or what could be the role of policy in addressing gender inequalities?  
What objectives should those policies address?
3. Strengthening of methodological skills  
What were the methodological considerations necessary to study gender inequality in case of the City of Vienna?  
What were the limitations of the methods?
4. Empowering of next-generation media workforce to a socially reflective and responsible role in the media  
What personal and professional strategies were observed throughout the Research Project successfully challenging gender inequalities?  
How do you see your role as a media professional in adhering to challenging gendered practices of media production?



The Resources Bank of the Advancing Gender in Media Industries Platforms (AGEMI) offered a wide selection of best practices in the media industries addressing gender inequalities to link to their findings on possible and successful methods of gender mainstreaming learned from the City of Vienna. The action proposals put forward overwhelmingly addressed the role of the media in raising such awareness, thus challenging inequalities of accessing and participating within public urban settings.

Students' responses and reactions were also instrumental in testing and validating the appropriateness of the Action Research & Learning teaching method. The course and the tasks were an *empowerment exercise* and an opportunity for visibility to each participant. The participatory learning scheme enabled the engagement with the *ordinary interactions performing gender and advanced their understanding of gender as a routine accomplishment embedded in everyday practices*. The analyses of the individual learning journals of the students (n=57) filled out throughout the semester delivered meaningful results about self-identification, engagement and mobilization as a matter of *social reflection and responsiveness to inequalities*.

#### **Kommentare:**

*Visibility* – The output of students' research was published on the self-crafted and curated online platform on gender (in)equality and media in Austria, the Let's Talk Equal web platform. The Let's Talk Equal web platform served as a deliberative and empowering communication channel to present their work as a point of reference as well as to speak up and let their voices be heard. Students' were provided with the opportunity for individual presence and publicity on the platform<sup>1</sup>. They were given full freedom to name, brand, and design the website in a democratic manner.

*Participatory Action Learning and Action Research* – the teaching method proved its appropriateness to empower and prepare students as future generations of media workforce to critically observe and challenge their roles and possibilities within the media with a socially responsible affection.

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<sup>1</sup>See section <https://letstalkequal.blog/aboutus/>.

