Governments have to show policy activism, such as decision-making, or the introduction of new programme. Taking decision is, in the word of L. Sfez (1973), the legendary weapon of those who govern, heroes who can demonstrate their power. In a similar vein, political scientists have for long underlined the symbolic dimension of decisions or policy announcement as an essential dimension of political activities (Edelman). When, in a given policy domain, one notices a range of new initiatives, programmes, budgets, decisions, different analytical tools have to be deployed to measure to analyse, measure or interpret the changes they may bring forward. Peter Hall ‘s (XX) seminal account of three orders of policy change represents a great example of ways to articulate different dynamics of policy change, from the main paradigm shift to the introduction of obscure technical policy instruments. This insight has proved crucial to understand the dynamics of EU policy making. Despite fifteen years of ongoing political difficulties and contested political dynamics under the strict control of nation states, the EU, and the commission in particular, has never stopped to seize the initiative, to promote new ideas and concept, to introduce new regulations, and, in the aftermath of the 1997 Lisbon summit, to embark on an ambitious programme linked to all
kinds of new policy initiative often characterised by the term “soft laws” and regulations. As an insider Tholoniat makes clear (2010) that in the case of the Open Method of Coordination, despite tight political limits, the Commission has developed strong policy activism in order to keep some momentum, to get more weight on the political agenda, to be seen as more visible and to keep some political momentum in starting new debates or introducing new schemes.

This paper starts with a question, which appeared on our research radar. Dealing with policy instruments in EU policies (Jacquot, 2010) and working on a data base of EU policy instruments (Halpern, Le Galès 2011), we identified an interesting “thing” i.e. “mainstreaming” which had been in the three policy areas we were familiar with, i.e. gender, environment and urban. Interestingly from our point of view, the introduction of “mainstreaming” in those three areas was heralded as a major policy shift in the three domains and promoted as a major EU policy innovation but also seemed to lead to similar policy consequences. Policy mainstreaming can be defined as the systemic horizontal incorporation of a particular political priority (gender equality or sustainable development) at the core of all public policies. Instead of creating a new agency, or to give more money to a policy sector, mainstreaming is seen as a way to enforce a political priority.

This paper aims at understanding where does this come from, why was mainstreaming introduce in different policy domains, for what effect and whether that matters for the EU policymaking process. A first question was to choose how to analyse “mainstreaming”. Is it a norm? A process? A new policy? Our insight was to consider policy mainstreaming as a policy instrument, an approach our research group has developed over the past few years (Hood and Margett 2007, Le Galès and Lascoumes, 2007) and which has proved insightful to analyse some of the change of the EU governance (Radaelli, Jordan, XXX see ref in intro numero WEP, Kassim Le Galès 2010). Policy instruments are defined as devices that are both technical and social, that organize specific social relations between the state and those it is addressed to, according to the representations and meanings they carries. It is a particular type of institution, a technical device with the generic purpose of carrying a concrete concept of the politics/society relationship and sustained by a concept of regulation.

In terms of method, mainstreaming is analysed in this paper as a policy instrument and, in a classical vein, we trace its career based on interviews and systematic analysis of EU documents. In the political sociology of policy instrument that we develop, we also know that different uses of policy instruments may lead to different results (Lascoumes, Le Bourhis, XX, Jacquot Woll xx). Comparing the impact of the introduction of mainstreaming in three policy domains over time is an opportunity to give a probabilistic account of the effect of this
particular instrument and to provide a more grounded interpretation beyond a one-sector analysis.

The creation of instruments of cooperation and coordination is a classic policy response to rationalise public policy. We argue that mainstreaming is one of those policy instruments. Indeed, considering recent negotiations on the EU’s budget, mainstreaming has emerged as a policy instrument dedicated to the rationalisation of European finances and policies. In that sense, mainstreaming can be considered as an innovative instrument, whose introduction and diffusion in different policy sectors took place when other stronger mechanisms of coordination have failed. Based on a longitudinal and a comparative analysis of mainstreaming, its diffusion across several EU policy domains (environment, gender and urban), and its restructuring, we assume that this policy instrument has contributed to shaping this process of rationalisation. The diffusion of mainstreaming between the UN and the EU – or the international and the European arenas – is a pendulum process with back and forth movements. The policy instrument approach therefore contributes to understanding how diffusion processes progressively led to the emergence of mainstreaming at EU level as a meta-instrument and as such, as a major driving force behind the rationalisation of European finances and policies.

The paper firstly starts by an analysis of mainstreaming as a policy instrument, its origins, characteristics, and instrumentation in EU policy making. On the EU side, two main sequences can be distinguished in this diffusion process towards the EU: a first moment of emergence of mainstreaming, during which the actors of the development policy community play a prominent role; a second moment of systematisation and diffusion of the instrument in new policy sectors, during which the link with “new governance” is central. Secondly, taking mainstreaming as the independent variable, we look at its effect in three policy sectors. The paper shows that policy mainstreaming has been introduced by the Commission as a meta instrument in the sense of Hood (i.e. definition) to rationalise a policy domain, leading to the marginalisation of the policy domain, not to enhance the political priority hence our analysis of policy mainstreaming as a hero of lost cause.

I “Integration principle” and “mainstreaming” as post 1968 international public policy norms
Classically, introducing new policy instruments allows political leader to make claims for innovations (Lascoumes and Le Galès, 2004: 359). EU officials are no exception and mainstreaming was introduced in the EU with the rhetoric of innovation and of differentiation with past techniques in order to enhance a symbolic effect and to attract renewed political attention towards policy domains. This stresses the dynamics of choice of instruments i.e. policy instrumentation or the set of problems posed by the choice and use of instruments (techniques, methods of operation, devices) that allow government policy to be made material and operational.

However, mainstreaming was not so “new” and did not appear out of a cupboard full of innovative and effective instruments. Indeed, it was first put forward in international debate and then introduced by the EU.

The idea of mainstreaming has its roots in the international debate about development, particularly vivid in the 1970s in a time of cold war and rival influence over third world countries (Greene, 2005). It emerged in relation to the promotion of the “integration principle” to give more depth and ambitions to general political priority. Mainstreaming gradually appeared as the policy instrument to implement the integration principle.

Mainstreaming first appeared during the 1972 UN Stockholm Conference on Human Development. The idea of mainstreaming is associated to the debates that surrounded the emergence of new issues on the international agenda post 1968, e.g., environmental protection, Women’s Rights, demography... The UN organised thematic conferences to mobilize a wide range of actors and to translate those concerns into new norms, agencies and programmes (Taylor and Curtis, 2005: 419). The role of social movements organizations was central in the emergence of those new issues on the international agenda (Dalton et al., 2003), via national official representatives at first, and later directly at international level. Both in the environmental and the gender equality sectors, UN organizations relied upon the information and the knowledge gathered by NGOs in order to develop specific programmes, policies and agencies (Willetts, 1996).

The pioneering 1972 UN Stockholm Conference on Human Development was the first to tackle the interrelationship between mass-poverty and environmental protection (Greene, 2005). Although the conference had been designed in order to address primarily ecological
issues, an alternative (and more political) representation of environmental protection progressively emerged at international level under the pressure of the development policy community NGOs. It directly led to two specific outcomes. One of the numerous tasks assigned to the UN Environmental Programme (UNEP) in 1972 was to take into account the interdependence between the issues of development and environment protection. Furthermore, the debates surrounding the creation of UNEP led to the formulation of the integration principle, later to be introduced in international environmental law. Although there was (and still is) no clear understanding at international level on this principle’s meaning and status (Nollkaemper, 2002: 24), it, i.e. the idea of coordination, integration, was considered as a possible solution to the problems deriving from sectoral approaches of environment questions, including the link between poverty and the environment. In a classic public policy dynamic, failures to deal with the environmental questions were attributed to the pitfalls of sectoral approaches: a more integrated, global approach was therefore required. The environment priority has to irrigate all policies, hence the idea of mainstreaming.

In the context of the existing North – South divide within international organizations in the early 1970s, mainstreaming and the integration principle benefited from massive political visibility. On the one hand, this attention explains why the Stockholm Conference was then used as a model for a series of similar UN events that addressed interlinked and cross-sectoral issues, such as the food crisis, urbanization, human rights, social development or gender equality. It also explains why the environmental case is considered as a milestone in the emergence and diffusion of mainstreaming towards other sectors, as well as the point of departure of a long-term career across policy domains and political levels.

Crucially, Women social movement organizations, such as Women In Development (WID) and Development Alternatives for Women of a New Era (DAWN), actively invested resources to promote the same idea of mainstreaming at the international level. Building on the outcomes of the Women’s Decade on “Equality, Development, Peace” (1975), of previous UN conferences on Women, e.g., Mexico (1975), Copenhagen (1980) and Nairobi (1985), the UN World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995 formally introduced the definition of gender mainstreaming as the adequate policy instrument to reach gender equality in sectors such as health, violence, education and vocational training, economy, decision-making, human rights or the environment.

On the other hand, in the environmental policy community, and especially among large environmental NGOs (Princen and Finger, 1994: 16), the idea of mainstreaming was not
considered as the main outcome of the Stockholm Conference: it was rather seen as a threat against the development of autonomous environmental policies at international, regional and national levels. Thus, environmental mainstreaming only emerged under this label in the International environmental policy in the Millenium Declaration (2000) (UNDP, 2004: 9). Three decades later, as coordination had become a major issue in this policy domain, environmental mainstreaming was introduced in order to mobilise actors and resources, and to reorganise UN programmes, policies and agencies in order to address the climate change agenda. If, however, and until then, environmental mainstreaming never existed as such the integration principle and then mainstreaming as its implementation tool, was based on the idea that environmental protection and economic and social development are compatible goals and that awareness of shared responsibility as well as common synergies have to be developed amongst actors.

By contrast, in the gender equality domain, the promotion of mainstreaming takes revealed a more defensive stance. The role of DAWN (a network of Southern Women’s activists and academics, working in partnership with international NGOs specialized in the field of gender and social development) was pivotal to transfer mainstreaming towards the gender equality policy domain, and then to transform it into an international norm of public policy. This directly contested the efficiency of the sectoral gender approach advocated by WID, that is to say the integration of women in development, which has evolved in the creation of “WID bureaux”, “WID programmes”, etc., later considered as “WID ghettos” and made responsible for the marginalisation of women and feminist approaches to development (Reanda, 1999). In preparation of the Beijing UN Conference on Women (1995), the debates within the newly created Gender In Development (GAD) Programme progressively led to the labelling of the integration principle as “Gender Mainstreaming”. Aiming at correcting the pitfalls of the WID approach, Gender mainstreaming is then, in the first sense, the expression of a will to integrate gender equality and gendered consequences of public action in the mainstream of public policies.

From the late 1990s onwards, mainstreaming has appeared both as a policy instrument but it has also reached the status of an international norm, influencing the behaviour of States and international organization and both considered as necessary (even in the absence of reward or sanction) and legitimate (see Florini, 1996). Gender mainstreaming has been adopted, between 1995 and 2000, by more than 100 national governments, the whole UN system and most of the international organizations – World Bank, IMF, OECD, WLO, EU, Council of
Europe, the Commonwealth, etc (Jacquot, 2008; UNDP, 2004). This makes it an “unprecedented” (True and Mintrom, 2001: 27) example of norm diffusion.

2. The emergence of mainstreaming across the EU: policy transfer and diffusion

The emergence of mainstreaming, whether in the environment, urban or gender equality policy domains, whether as a norm or a policy instrument seemed to rely upon a dynamic similar at the international and EU levels: the search for an alternative approach to overcome policy failures. Mainstreaming’s appeal was twofold: to bring a fresh approach and a flavour of policy innovation along with a possible solution to the problems (e.g. coordination, political will, agenda-setting, governability, etc.) rose by sectoral approaches to systemic issues. The process of diffusion across sectors underlines the key role of specific policy community actors in designing, labelling and operationalizing (i.e., integration principle, gender mainstreaming) this innovation according to the policy context

*Environment: Importing an ambiguous consensus.*

Over time, international regulations played a key role in legitimizing the development of EU legislation, even in policy domains that are not mentioned by treaties. In the environmental policy domain, EU actors proceeded to the transposition of the integration principle as part of a large set of measures derived from international law, including solutions still looking for their problems (March and Olsen, XX). Indeed, the lack of clarity of the integration principle was replicated at the EU level when it was first introduced in the Single European Act in 1986 and the article 130 R. 2 (in Title 7 on the environment policy), since member states could not agree upon a common definition. As is often the case, this did not prevent the formulation of an “ambiguous consensus” (Palier, 2004) allowing, perhaps accelerating, the formal introduction of this notion in the Single European Act but hindering its operationalization through a specific policy instrument. Insofar as this very broad principle of integration was not clarified in terms of policy objectives, instruments, or some sort of a blueprint, it left an important margin of manoeuvre for actors to define the contours of their environmental liabilities and to define an implementation strategy (Lascoumes, 2008).

At first, by contrast to the principle of environmental protection (McCormick, 2001), the integration principle was not considered as a main driving force behind the development of an
autonomous European environmental policy by policy community actors, at EU level, e.g., Commission’s officials, environmental NGOs, and at national level, especially in so-called “green” Member States, e.g., the Netherlands, the FRG and later Denmark (Halpern 2009). Until the Single Act, problems of coordination, for instance with development issues were not considered as a priority by policy community actors, who primarily aimed at securing the formal recognition of the European Community’s competence over environmental issues. Moreover, the actors in charge of the elaboration of “green measures” at EU level, and especially Commission’s officials (Weale, 2002: 89) draw upon international environmental law, which is characterized by a scientific conception of environmental issues and addresses these issues vertically (water, air, soil, products, etc.). The integration principle remained relatively marginal during the earliest stage of the development of the European environmental policy.

In this context, the emergence of mainstreaming as a policy instrument was hindered until the late 1990s. Policy instruments are usually meant to stabilize the framing of a problem, or the issues related to a specific problem. In the environmental case in particular, the goals, the policy objectives have proved ambitious, with multiple dimensions, different time lengths and contradictory at times, going in many directions. Competition between different frames of what the environment policy should be was and remained very vivid. Insofar as mainstreaming would have been designed in order to create synergies and to mobilize actors and resources in the environmental policy domain, it failed in creating a sense of collective responsibility around environmental issues.

Gender equality : mainstreaming to overcome sectoral policy failure

By contrast, the introduction of mainstreaming in the EU gender equality policy contributed to the stabilisation of an alternative representation of the issues at stake. Gender Mainstreaming emerged at EU level as a solution to combat gender inequality at a later stage of this policy’s development.

Gender equality had been included in the Treaty of Rome (article 119), and with a corpus of 13 directives, gender equality policy was considered as one of the most institutionalised European social policy (Cram, 1997). It was primarily implemented through legislative and budgetary policy instruments. However, in the beginning of the 1990s, gender equality policy
faced a crisis\(^1\). Research reports published by experts networks on gender equality brought evidence showing that fifteen years of active Community policies had not significantly reduced actual inequalities between women and men in the workplace and on the labour market. These experts focused on the traditional policy instruments of EU policy: regulatory and budgetary instruments were questioned and deemed unable to remedy the inequalities between women and men. Drawing on the diagnosis that had been made a decade earlier by Women’s organizations, policy objectives were re-evaluated accordingly: legislation “must” be more efficient, and positive actions should not be too specific lest they imprison women in a female “ghetto”. The reassessment of classical gender equality policy instruments has gone hand in hand with efforts to learn from past experiences and to do things “differently”. Gender mainstreaming was singled out as an alternative form of governance.

Gender inequalities, a transectoral issue, exist in all sorts of domains and policy sectors, hence must be addressed through transversal policy instruments such as policy mainstreaming. It aims at better integrating a gender perspective into all policy EU policies so that any policy or action developed and implemented by the EU does not impede the principle of gender equality.

Supported by the legitimacy deriving from the outcome of the UN Conferences on Women, gender mainstreaming was included for the first time in a European document in the third Action Programme on Equality between Women and Men (1991-1995), drafted in 1988-1989. Gender Mainstreaming was then integrated in the Amsterdam Treaties with article 3. 2, which states that *all the policies and actions of the EU aim at eliminating gender inequalities and at promoting equality between women and men.*

\(^1\) During this first period, the circulation of ideas and of actors between the international and the EU levels strongly influenced the emergence of mainstreaming at EU level. For instance, the OECD DAC (Development Assistance Committee) was one of the main channel between the UN, the OECD and the EU to diffuse the notion of transversal integration of specific issues in mainstream public policies. (Elgström, 2000, Jacquot 2006)
As such, gender mainstreaming is the result of a process of instrumental creativity by the European institutions; it is a “claimed innovation” (Lascoumes and Le Galès, op.cit.). The novelty aspect is linked to an efficiency concept. The rhetoric of innovation and of differentiation with past techniques also induced a symbolic effect – an image makeover for gender equality policy that attracted renewed political attention. Indeed, mainstreaming puts a clear focus on procedures, and it is presented as a solution to bypass the obstacles that gender equality policy and its traditional instruments had faced.

This cross-sectoral analysis of the emergence of Mainstreaming at EU level shows that the diffusion of mainstreaming from the international level towards the EU level in both sectors was primarily structured by policy dynamics. The diffusion of mainstreaming is not “agentless”, and does not result in “spontaneous policy-making” (Dolowitz, 2000: 3). Indeed, our empirical findings in both sectors show the crucial role of actors, either policy community actors or emerging ones, in channelling the diffusion of new ideas and procedures. As Thatcher observed in the case of cross-national policy learning (2007: 263), cross-sectoral comparison shows that cross-level diffusion processes depends upon the stability of policy community actors and the allocation of resources between them.

The findings also clearly support our hypothesis: mainstreaming was adopted as a new policy instrument to overcome previous policy failure, similarly to what took place at the international level. The case is very clear for gender equality. By contrast, the non-emergence of mainstreaming as a policy instrument in the earliest stages of the European environmental policy may be explained by the fact that the identification of a policy failure was not so clear, many aspects were more ambiguous, so the same mechanism did not apply: mainstreaming was not considered as a solution.

3) Translation as a meta instrument for rationalisation, when mainstreaming meets the EU “New governance” agenda

Most policy transfer are not neutral. The sociology of science and technology has emphasised dynamics of translation, hybridation, bricolage associated to the introduction of an imported innovation (Latour Callon XX). As Lascoumes argues (XX) the same applies to policy solution or policy instruments. Policy import goes together with a process of translation, or reinterpretation, where, sometimes, actors get lost.
While importing policy mainstreaming as a new instrument as suggested by networks of international actors, the Commission did its political work. As mentioned before, mainstreaming was put forward as a “new” policy instrument, another evidence of the policy expertise and restless search for effectiveness that the Commission wishes to demonstrate. Also, choosing the instrument was not a neutral process. As was argued elsewhere, focussing on the instrumentation, i.e. the political dynamics associated to the choice of instruments to operationalize a policy can be fruitful to understand the goals of political actors (Lascoumes Le Galès 2007). Sometimes, the instruments become the policy (Dehousse, 2004).

We argue that the emergence of mainstreaming as a policy instrument is closely linked to its instrumentation, i.e. to the choice and use of devices (techniques, methods of operation, etc.) that allow government policy to be made material and operational. Our interpretation is based on our original research in the three sectors and derive from the comparison of those three policy sectors. While developing the “New governance” agenda, the commission reshaped mainstreaming as a rationalisation policy instrument, inexpensive and allowing them to demonstrate a strong interest for the salience of broad policy questions... such as gender equality, environment and at a later stage, the urban. Analysing the instrumentation of mainstreaming involves not only understanding the reasons that drive towards retaining one instrument rather than another, but also envisaging the effects produced by these choices. Creative use by actors may lead to all sorts of consequences, including resistance and protest. However, instruments have their own logic too, they are not neutral. There is a limit to the contigency argument. Under some circumstances, they are more likely to lead to some effect. Adopting this probalistic neo institutionalist argument, we try to prvide some evidence to support test the following hypothesis : because the commission used mainstreaming as a meta instrument for rationalisation, mainstreaming a policy domain leads to the marginalisation of that policy domain. In the three policy sectors, mainstreaming had three main impacts: rationalisation, integration, symbolic political voluntarism.

Rationalisation and integration are classic public policy questions since Weber at least. A public policy can be analysed as a sedimentation of programmes, institutions and policy instruments. This sedimentation leads to different effects often leading to policy changes over time (Streeck and Thelen, 2005). Beyond this endogenous logic of change, the accumulation of laws, devices, programmes, instruments, priorities, gives political entrepreneurs an
opportunity to be seen to improve the efficiency and the effectiveness of a given policy sector. In particular, rationalisation emerges as a strong legitimation device for public policy change at a time of financial pressure or uncertainties about political priorities. Rationalisation and integration, like modernisation, are mantra, which can be mobilised in different countries, in different context, at different periods, to manifest a vigorous political attempt aiming at increasing the performance of public policies in a given sector.

In Europe, in the late 1990’s, the Santer Commission went for the managerial rationalisation of the European Commission. It stressed the need to concentrate on its core functions as keeper of the Treaties, to supervise more closely budgetary programme management, to change the management of human resources and to formalise relations with external partners (Dimier, 2003). In the post Delors period, after two decades of staunch EU integration and enlargement, rationalisation became one of the key words in different policy sectors, which had faced dynamic expansion over the previous decade. Overcoming past failures and shortcomings is therefore central in the call for rationalisation and integration, as exemplified by the gender equality and the urban policy domains.

By the mid 1990’s, mainstreaming was becoming more institutionalised within the EU and its rapid dissemination at the international level gave the instrument a stronger legitimacy. The Prospective Unit of the Commission then engaged into the preparation of the Governance White Paper (Lebessis and Paterson, 1997, 2000). Reflecting on the “new governance” agenda, they saw that the use and prescription of policy mainstreaming would allow them to tackle the complexity and multidimensionality of certain issues. This debate was related to policy evaluation and the search for new policy instruments beyond the “méthode communautaire”2. In a context of a major legitimacy crisis (Boussaguet and Jacquot, 2009), the question of public policy innovation in terms of instruments was designed to increase its efficiency, and consequently its legitimacy. The absence of coordination between policy sectors, the vertical treatment of policy problems, the “functional segregation” aiming at reducing complexity (Lebessis and Paterson, 2000) were made responsible for a lack of efficiency of EU policies, i.e. the non-decreasing level of gender inequalities at work, the low compliance and the bad record of the implementation of the environment directives, the persisting high level of geographical and social segregation in European cities.

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2 See Salamon 2002 for a similar debate in the US
The Commission White paper on governance promotes the principle of coherence (European Commission, 2001). This exercise of questioning past solutions has lead to the multiplication of transversal strategies in EU policies in order to being able to govern – politically as well as administratively – multidimensional problems and to bypass ineffective sectoral approaches. The climax of this mainstreaming trend is certainly the constitutional project – now Lisbon Treaty. Its Title 2 (art. 7-17) on the “provisions having general application” states that the “Union shall ensure consistency between its policies and activities” and refers to the necessary transversal treatment of gender equality, environmental protection, employment, the fight against social exclusion, education and vocational training, health protection, consumers protection and the well-being of animals.

Mainstreaming emerged as the instrument of this “consistency”. A soft and cheap policy instrument, which did not challenge Member States’ sovereignty. It was reinvented as a meta-instrument of cooperation, in the sense of Christopher Hood (1983), an instrument to coordinate and make more effective existing policy instrument. Mainstreaming, during this process has become a ready-to-cook policy-making recipe. As a policy meta instrument, mainstreaming was operationalized in a diverse set of more precise policy tools and techniques.

Based upon an unstable combination of analytical (i.e. statistics, indicators, benchmarks, impact assessment), awareness-raising (i.e. training, good and bad practices guides, NGOs consultation) and organizational (i.e. expert groups, experience-sharing committees) tools, mainstreaming was opposed to traditional legislative and budgetary instruments (Jacquot, 2009). Its instrumentation was based upon the ideas of absence of constraint (i.e. no sanctions) procedural functioning and transversality. Mainstreaming is based on coordination rather than on negotiation. By contrast to directives it is not politically costly. Mainstreaming is a priori constituted by a set of measures, procedures which do not command the attribution of a specific budget. Mainstreaming is a transversal policy instrument, taking into account multiple dimensions beyond sectoral administrative division. Mainstreaming resonates with the principles of the new modes of governance (Treib, Bähr, Falkner, 2007).

The reinvention of mainstreaming as a meta-instrument, opened new avenues for diffusion towards other EU policy domains, as shown by the urban case. The EU urban policy had a long and very slow start, as there (still) is no base in the Treaty (Grazi 2006). The strange fate of the European urban policy is in part explained by the fact that urban policy instruments were more or less always a version of regional policy instruments, innovations was limited
(Bache 2008). A long term characteristics of the urban policy is the ongoing tension on the framing of the urban policy over several decades, economic development issues are always entangled with quality of life environment issues, and social questions, social cohesion, exclusion, segregation. The urban policy developed in the back door of regional policy. In 1988, the ERDF framework included 5 objectives including the famous objective 2 for industrial declining regions with a high level of unemployment and declining industrial employment. Partnership and additionality were operationalised as key principles. In the 1990’s, Bruce Millan started a series of initiatives, networks, Urban pilot projects and later the Urban Programme which marked the heyday of the urban policy.

The innovation, which appeared in the 1997-1999 period, was the idea of urban mainstreaming. The mainstreaming instrument was only introduced in 2000 and Community initiatives programmes, which in particular benefited cities (URBAN II of course but also INTERREG and EQUAL), were still in place. In the urban case, the momentum of the rising urban policy, the making of dynamics coalitions of urban actors and the multiplication of urban programmes was worrying for regional policy actors. Mayors met in different networks over time. The EU Parliament created an urban group in 2002. In 2005, the EU Parliament again produced reports to get resources for urban programmes. Those different groups and networks were very much involved in the preparation of an URBAN + initiative, which was eventually dropped in 2006. But the rise of urban policy was consistently resisted within the DG Regio or DG competition.

Thinking in instrumentation terms again, mainstreaming the urban policy had two major attractions: on the one hand, the commission could claim the urban was becoming a transversal priority, and much effort was done to demonstrate the “urban” dimension of EU policies through a large rebranding and relabeling process. On the other hand, mainstreaming the urban policy was an elegant solution to “rationalise”, i.e. to get rid of different initiatives first and foremost the Urban Programme. At a time of marginalisation of the EU territorial cohesion policy (Hooghe 1999), rationalization meant preventing more expenditure, getting rid of existing programmes and avoiding the rise of a new policy domain.

Indeed, during negotiations on the EU’s budget, and especially on the attribution of structural funds for the 2007 – 2013 funding period, urban mainstreaming emerged as a policy instrument dedicated to the rationalisation of European finances and policies. Potentially, mainstreaming had a more important potential for cities but as is well known in public policy research: implementation is everything and the full logic of mainstreaming was at play for regional policy regulations. Key words of simplification, rationalisation and concentration
were issued to mask a continuing decline of the EU urban and regional policy. For 2007-2013, the Commission argued precisely that the principles derived from the URBAN programmes were rationalised in the objective “convergence”. Member states were also encouraged to focus on cities. All policies were supposed to be “urbanised” and many documents were produced to relabel various policies with “urban” colours but at the end of the day, the emerging urban policy was marginalised.

In a way, “cities” have won the argument, because of the importance of the urban level, of cities as growth engines but also level to fight poverty and employment or strategic sites to protect the environment. Cities have decisively won a discursive argument and their importance is then widely accepted in Commission’s circles, beyond the DG Regio. But one unintended consequence of this importance given to cities was not to develop a more significant urban policy but rather to make visible the impact of the EU in cities through its main programmes. Systematic analysis of EU programmes and their impact in cities was therefore undertaken in order to assess the role of the employment strategy, of the Research and developments strategy, energy policy. Mainstreaming seems to have been used by the Commission as an exercise (with systematic production of reports) to show and make visible the urban dimension (defined loosely and widely) of various programmes. Urban mainstreaming has become a labelling exercise similar to what has happened in gender and the environment. This has become a characteristic of the EU urban policy: the less important, autonomous the urban policy becomes, the more various bits and pieces and urban labelling of mainstream programme takes place. Giving more visibility through communication and information instruments to a disappearing policy domain is a classic public policy strategy.

In the case of the gender policy, the specific goal was to “professionalise” a policy that was seen as “old-fashioned” and to reduce the considerable autonomy that the policy area has enjoyed since the mid-1970s. Introducing “mainstreaming” was also seen as a way to rationalise a policy regarded as out-dated with a diverse set of policy tools and techniques. Time had come for rationalisation, the introduction of a new instrument able to rationalise and integrate existing programmes and instruments. Gender mainstreaming was based on the ideas of procedural processes, coordination, transversality, and freedom from constraints. Gender mainstreaming takes into account all the dimensions of gender inequalities, and crosses over administrative divisions, hence the dynamic of integration it is supposed to rise. Since 1996-1997, the instrumentation of mainstreaming has been at work within EU policies. Empirical research shows that the institutionalisation of gender mainstreaming has been a
legitimisation instrument for some actors from the gender equality policy community (Jacquot, 2010). By adapting their means of action and their objectives to the new norm, they have been able to secure the visibility and legitimacy of gender equality on the EU agenda. Furthermore, they have been in position to use gender mainstreaming as leverage to extend the perimeter of gender equality to new fields of action, which were not part of the traditional social perimeter of European gender equality policy.

However, actors involved in the implementation of gender mainstreaming at EU level – whether Commission officials from all DGs, MEPs, or social NGOs members – make a “conformist” use of the instrument. Indeed, the adoption of the new policy instrument did not raise much opposition in the gender inequality domain for three reasons: 1) mainstreaming was not creating a new policy sector entering in competition with others; 2) as it was supposed to be transectoral, every DG had to do something about it but without clear sanction and constraints, they could do little and 3) the instrument was politically legitimate (international).

Gender mainstreaming has been established as a policy norm by the Treaty and by the procedures and tools developed to manage its implementation. Actors behave in a rational way: they did not care much about the norm but they symbolically act in conformity with the norm. Most of EU civil servants acknowledge the legitimacy of the gender equality objective and the necessity of taking it into account in their daily routines. But this administrative demand is only formally met with some exceptions on the margin: gender impact studies are conducted: statistics and data are increasingly disaggregated by sex; references to gender mainstreaming and to the EU commitment to gender equality, and specific support to women candidates are integrated into the Commission’s agenda. Gender mainstreaming has become consensual; open resistance is rare but inertia and lip service are the rule. The implementation of gender mainstreaming was not a “revolution” (Hafner-Burton and Pollack, 2007). Despite the introduction of “naming and shaming” tools, most DG’s within the Commission were able to fulfil the required procedures and to produce information without contributing much more than before to the fight against gender inequalities in their own fields.

By contrast, the case of the environment shows the limits of the mainstreaming’s logic of rationalisation and integration. In a policy domain, which is primarily structured by its instruments, and in which the capacity for instrumental innovation was limited (Halpern, 2010), the implementation of mainstreaming did not lead to major effects. Re-labelled under
the notion of “greening” in the Cardiff Process (1998), the idea of mainstreaming was reinvested by policy community actors in order to criticize this vertical approach to environmental issues and to contest its efficiency by promoting logic of rationalization and integration (Lenschow, 1997; 2002). The integration principle was written in the treaties: Maastricht stipulates that the protection of the environment has to be taken into account in the definition and implementation of the other policies of the Community; Amsterdam reinforces it with the introduction of the principle of sustainable development (art. 6). In this approach towards environmental issues, the integration principle strongly linked with the concept of sustainable development, aimed at developing a “transectoral” approach to environmental issues, not only within the Commission and other EU institutions, but also in all decisions and policies in the EU at large. As such, the integration principle is today considered as the main tool for implementing the sustainable development principle, which is at the heart of the European growth strategy or "Lisbon Strategy" since the Council of Gothenburg (2001). It aims at "greening" all policies as well as economic and social activities within the EU, thus applying to at all levels of government.

However, despite this re-labelling process, the integration principle remains understood in its most limited approach by policy community actors and did not translate in policy mainstreaming. On one hand, the integration principle offered a serious alternative to the vertical approach to environmental issues, which had long prevailed within this policy’s actors at EU level. It directly aims at reducing sectoral and geographical strategies of resistance and inertia. On the other hand, and given its bond with the sustainable development principle, no clear operationalization and implementation strategy could stabilize at EU level. Member states had indeed very different understandings of the integration principle, a diversity of approaches and representations which led in turn to various outcomes (Baker, 1997; O’Riordan and Voisey, 1998). From a German perspective for example, the integration principle created new opportunities to achieve the ecological modernisation of national and/or European industries and to serve as an offensive trade policy; whereas from a British perspective, this principle was considered as a major rationalisation tool both at national and EU levels, at the risk of diluting the objectives of the European environmental policy. These competing representations explain that the formulation and, later, the implementation of mainstreaming as a European policy instrument within the Cardiff process was not strong.

Conclusion
Symbolic political voluntarism and marginalisation of the policy domain

Mainstreaming is finally a policy instrument, which aims at making highly visible the EU priority given to a particular policy objective. In line with the integration logic, mainstreaming was introduced and sold to political actors as an instrument aiming at raising the profile and the importance of an issue with all the policies and activities of the EU. On paper, mainstreaming could be seen as a major breakthrough. Mainstreaming gender, environmental or urban issues was advocated by the Commission as the triumph of a policy domain influencing, bending, irrigating all European policies. Our argument is that the implementation of the mainstreaming instrument has indeed led to massive reframing of various policy questions in terms of environment, gender, urban thus allowing the Commission to trumpet its successes. However this systematic reframing in EU policy documents and discourses has de facto led to the marginalisation of the domain, the loss of resources in institutionalised policy sectors and, in fine, to a growing discrepancy between EU policy discourses and implemented programmes.

In the three policy sectors mainstreaming was introduced for a similar set of reasons, i.e. similar logics of instrumentation, and secondly let to similar unintended effects. Several authors have made the point about this policy instrument innovation as a strategy for the Commission to mobilise its own services and to appear as a dynamic entrepreneur in Europe (Dehousse, 2004; Tholoniat, 2010; Lenschow and Knill, 2000). In that sense, mainstreaming is one of a range of new policy instruments progressively introduced over the last decade which gave rise to the literature on the “new” governance of the “new “Europe (Borras and Greve, 2004; Kassim and Le Galès 2010; Bruno and al., 2008).

Mainstreaming is essentially a meta-instrument of cooperation. It does not follow a uniform implementation scheme, but rather one that varies according to its usage by different actors (Jacquot, 2006; Jacquot and Woll, 2004, 2008). Since there is no unified or binding model at the EU level (and at international level) determining what mainstreaming “should be”, each actor responsible for its implementation has to choose from among the aforementioned list of tools to tailor a strategy. Indeed, this article shows that mainstreaming one domain could make sense and requires important mobilisation. In some cases, as shown by the environmental case, it remains a mere principle, whose instrumentation is hindered by policy dynamics or in the absence of a shared representation of the issue at stake. In other cases, the logic of mainstreaming achieved an important mobilization of actors and resources,
thus contributing to profound policy change, to the reorganization of existing policy instruments, to its progressive marginalization and even its quasi death in the urban case, for the time being.

These findings also contribute to understanding the role of innovations in policy change. Analysing the origins, the circulation and the implementation of mainstreaming across sectors and levels shows how a mere idea progressively developed into a judicial principle, a international norm of public policy, a policy instrument and finally, into a meta-instrument of cooperation. Indeed, cross-sectoral comparison of instrumentation logics shows that the diffusion of mainstreaming, as a policy innovation, was highly selective and deeply structured by dynamics of policy change. Indeed, in its most developed version, mainstreaming was introduced in ongoing policy reform processes. But in any case, the fate of mainstreaming can be seen as highly successful: in a time span of almost four decades, mainstreaming became a ready-to-cook policy-making recipe for decision-makers in search of alternative solutions for policies deemed to be unsuccessful. Its (re-)emergence under one form or another in these policy domains aimed at legitimating the intervention of a political level in domains over which they had no clear competence, at contesting existing power relations within an existing sector through the reframing of problems, or at contesting the autonomous development of a policy domain.

Indeed, its seemingly neutral (and inoffensive) character made it consensual in the three policy domains we studied. In the absence of a clear and unified definition of mainstreaming, it could easily be presented as a “claimed innovation” by decision-makers that served to making highly visible the priority given to a particular policy objective. One cannot blame the EU (and the UN) equivalent to the street level bureaucrat to play the labelling game with existing programmes in order to conform to new policy norms rather than changing behaviours and allocations of funding, always a demanding task.

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