



## **The velvet triangle in the Flemish field of women's and LGB movements: networks, strategies and concepts**

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Athena Working Group 3B, Seminar "Women's (Gender) Studies and women's movements: Considering encounters", Panteion University, Athens, 4<sup>th</sup> of May 2006

In Flanders (the Dutch speaking part of Belgium) an official Equal Opportunities (EO) policy was launched in 1995. It thus forms a relatively young policy domain. Nonetheless there have already been far-reaching changes in the Flemish landscape of EO with regard to policy networks, actors, legal and institutional structures, aims and content.

This paper presents the findings of the qualitative follow-up study "The velvet triangle from upfront: networks, ideas and strategies in the Flemish field of Equal Opportunities" (Godemont & Motmans, 2006). It checks and completes the remaining questions and remarkable findings from the foregoing quantitative research project "Innovative Transnational Equal Opportunities Policy" by Wiercx and Woodward (2004) and formulates challenges for policy makers and movement actors. Both studies<sup>3</sup> examine the networks, the strategies and the use and understanding of EO concepts in the field of Flemish women's and LGB organizations and their relations with policy makers and academics. The survey of Wiercx and Woodward (2004)<sup>4</sup> was conducted among civil society actors<sup>4</sup>, in the follow-up study policy makers were also interviewed. The concept of the "velvet triangle" forms the theoretical background. This concept was coined by Woodward (2000, 2004). It refers to the factual or the possible interaction between feminist bureaucrats and politicians ("femocrats"), academics and formally organized voices in the women's movement with regard to gender equality, a field that is

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<sup>3</sup> The Dutch reports of the survey-analysis and the follow-up study are available in pdf-format on the website of the PRCEO: [www.steunpuntgelijkekansen.be](http://www.steunpuntgelijkekansen.be)

<sup>4</sup> 74 civil society organizations concerned with EO and policy influencing, active on the Flemish and/or the transnational level, took part in the survey by filling in a postal questionnaire in the periode january-june 2004. Few small organizations (e.g. without at least two paid employees) were involved in the survey.

traditionally characterized by informal relationships. Gender policy making has a transnational dimension and occurs through multi-layered interaction between different policy levels<sup>5</sup>.

Firstly, we explore to what extent triangle constellations form a part of EO policy making in Flanders. Are these triangles velvet (e.g. existing within the women's movement) or increasingly rainbow (e.g. incorporating other target groups besides women)? Are they nationally or increasingly transnationally formed? Secondly, we examine the interpretation and application of EO concepts, such as "diversity" and "mainstreaming", by the different actors. Finally, we analyse the strategies that women's and LGB movements deploy in policy influencing.

## 1. Methodology

In the summer of 2005 we conducted 15 organizational in-depth interviews with 6 policy makers, politicians as well as civil servants in the Flemish Ministries of EO and Employment, with 9 Flemish civil society actors in the institutionalized women's<sup>6</sup> and with 12 in the LGB<sup>7</sup> movements. Furthermore, we organized two focus groups, one with women's and one with LGB grassroots organizations<sup>8</sup> operating in Flanders. By including grass roots organizations, we wanted to look beyond the established voices of subsidized organizations. We applied researchers' triangulation to enhance the quality of our data gathering and analysis. All interviews and focus groups were taped, transcribed and analysed according to the "qualitative content analysis" method, using the Atlas/ti programme for Windows.

## 2. Networks

The follow-up study elaborates to what extent women's and LGB organizations are familiar, keep in touch regularly<sup>9</sup>, and cooperate<sup>10</sup> with other civil society organizations, both within their own target group and transversally, on a national as well as on a transnational level. Moreover, it focuses on the relations organizations have with policy makers and academics.

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<sup>5</sup> The same individual or institutional actor may be present on more than one level of interaction (Woodward, 2000).

<sup>6</sup> The following women's organizations were involved in the follow-up study: the Dutch speaking Women's Council (Nederlandstalige Vrouwenraad, NVR), the Women's Consultation Committee (Vrouwen Overleg Komitee, VOK), the Expertise Centre on Migrant Girls and Women (Steunpunt Allochtone Meisjes en Vrouwen, SAMV) and the Catholic Labour Women (Katholieke Arbeiders Vrouwen, KAV).

<sup>7</sup> The following LGB organizations were involved in the follow-up study: the LGB Federation (de Halebifederatie, HF), Young Though Not Heterosexual (Wel Jong Niet Hetero, WJNH) and the Pink Houses in Antwerp, Gent, Hasselt and Brussels.

<sup>8</sup> "Grass roots" literally means the base, the common people. A grass root organization originates in a local community and is not elitary. Most grass root organizations aren't member of an umbrella organization and try to influence policy directly, or don't engage in policy influencing at all.

<sup>9</sup> In the postal questionnaire, "relations on a regularly base" were defined as "contacts that take place more than three times a year".

<sup>10</sup> In the postal questionnaire, "cooperation" was defined as "structural relations that entail the exchange of resources, staff and so on or working together with regard to a theme or topic".

## 2.1 Civil society

Wiercx and Woodward (2004) conducted a social network analysis on their survey data to describe the field of Flemish and European civil society organizations concerned with EO. Social network analysis is, among other things, based on the “social capital” theory. This theory puts the social relations of actors to the fore. Burt (1992) states that certain configurations of social relations result in more information and control than others do. Put otherwise, the position of an actor in a network determines the opportunities and constraints it encounters (Wellman, 1988). Not the amount of relations matters most, but the variation in these relations and the position of the actors involved in the interaction. When applied to policy networks and networks of social movements, social network analysis comes to similar findings.

### *The Flemish network of civil society organizations*

The network analysis Wiercx and Woodward (2004) carried out demonstrated that civil society organizations for women and LGB's in the Flemish field of EO are relatively tight-knit. However, as contacts intensify, the connections between organizations loosen: although organizations know each other (by name), they don't have regular contacts and cooperate even less. The preconditions for the dissemination of information in the network seemed to be met (few isolated actors, small average distance between organizations, many alternative connections), but the follow-up study brought to light some flaws, which we will elaborate in this paper (see §2.1: transnational contact).

### *Central organizations*

The survey (Wiercx and Woodward, 2004) and the follow up study (Godemont & Motmans, 2006) identified the Dutch speaking Women's Council (Nederlandstalige Vrouwen Raad, NVR) and the Women's Consultation Committee (Vrouwen Overleg Komitee, VOK) as central actors for the women's movement and pointed out the LGB Federation (Holebifederatie, HF) as central to the LGB movement. In the follow-up study (Godemont & Motmans, 2006), respondents made a distinction within the category of 'central organizations' between umbrella organizations (NVR and HF) and think tanks (VOK). Both sorts of organizations were seen as complementary: the latter can take critical standpoints, keeping the established voices alert and open for new issues, whereas the former are in a good position to negotiate with policy makers about the issues raised. Umbrella organizations are intermediary to their supporters and policy makers. Moreover, they are crucial for trans-issue and transnational contact. So, they were seen as very useful actors for policy influencing. However, respondents took a critical stance in the issue of democratic representation and voice by these umbrella organizations. One respondent put it very bluntly:

*In fact, umbrella organizations are cheap second range administrations to please the Minister, with little interest in innovative policy making (focus group LGB movement).*

Respondents also mentioned the following weaknesses in democratic representation: the absence of non-affiliated individuals and groups, underrepresentation of subgroups within target groups and underrepresentation of regions (in the LGB movement). With regard to democratic voice, they considered the fading of visions following from standpoints based on consensus problematic. To solve this problem the Dutch speaking Women's Council is considering majority/minority reporting on some issues. Instead of taking a particular standpoint provided that all member organizations go along with it, this central women's organization wants to reflect the different visions that come to the fore during debates.

#### *Trans-issue contact*

The survey (Wiercx & Woodward, 2004) pointed out that trans-issue contact between women's and LGB organizations is rare. Women's and LGB organizations make up separate networks. This finding was confirmed by the respondents of the follow-up study (Godemont & Motmans, 2006). Furthermore, it showed limited interaction with organizations concerned with other EO dimensions, such as ethnicity, disability and so on. Trans-issue contacts are ad hoc (common standpoints, events) rather than structural (exchange of expertise or formal consultation) and run primarily through the doors of the professionally staffed umbrella organizations. Moreover, the follow-up study found fault lines not only between, but also within target groups: age and gender in the LGB movement (with LGB women striving for man/woman parity in the governing organ of the LGB Federation), and ethnicity and generation in the women's movement, entailing different interpretations of emancipation. Respondents considered cross-issue contact easier at the local level, on an informal base and with regard to a concrete theme. The example of the National Women's Day was often cited.

#### *Transnational contact*

The umbrella organizations have contact with European organizations: the European Women's Lobby (EWL) in the women's movement and the European Region of the International Lesbian and Gay Association (ILGA-Europe) in the LGB movement. Grassroot organizations rarely keep in touch with European civil society organizations due to a shortage of resources - especially in voluntary or semi-voluntary organizations, mainly in the LGB movement - rather than a lack of interest (Wiercx & Woodward, 2004). The survey findings brought Wiercx and Woodward (2004) to the presumption of a bottleneck effect, i.e. the situation in which information from the transnational level disseminates incompletely and slowly to organizations in the periphery of a national network, and vice versa. The follow-up study confirmed this presumption and found that even the internal dissemination of transnational information within umbrella organizations sometimes falls short (Godemont & Motmans, 2006).

## 2.2 Civil society and policy

In the survey, civil society actors were asked about their interaction with policy makers, more specifically about the frequency and the evaluation of these relations and the extent to which policy

makers inform and evaluate civil society actors. The follow-up study further explored these questions, gathering data from both civil society actors and policy makers, and mapped visions on 'good practices' of influencing policy.

#### *The subsidiarity principle*

The survey showed that, in general, the more local the policy level, the more frequent the contact between civil society actors and policy makers is. Wiercx & Woodward (2004) found that Flemish organizations very seldom have contact with members of the European institutions, such as the Council, Commission, or Parliamentarians (73% said never). The follow-up study demonstrated that organizations mainly have contact with policy makers that form their subsidizing authority, on the policy level they operate on (Godemont & Motmans, 2006). Flemish civil society organizations do not put into practice the so-called "boomerang strategy", i.e. the appeal to political institutions on the European or global level to meet demands on the regional or national level.

#### *Evaluation*

The evaluation of relations with policy makers by civil society actors that took part in the survey (Wiercx & Woodward, 2004) differed according to policy level, (institutional) actor and target group. The lower the policy level and the more informal the contact, the better the evaluation was. The latter finding substantiates an important trait of the velvet triangle, namely the importance of informal, i.e. personal, relations (Woodward, 2000; 2004). Civil society actors were more positive about civil servants than about politicians. Respondents in the follow-up study pointed out the expertise and continuity of function from the former as opposed to the latter (Godemont & Motmans, 2006). Both studies found that LGB organizations are more positive in their evaluation than those in the women's movement are. The respondents of the Flemish Ministry for EO commented that the cooperation with LGB organizations was more pleasant than with women's organizations, where they often encountered a lack of trust and even hostility.

#### *'Good' influencing policy*

In the in-depth interviews, visions of 'good' influencing policy differed between civil society actors and policy makers, and even among civil society actors. Central civil society organizations stressed the importance of obtaining subsidies and agendasetting. Grassroot organizations focused on direct intervention and politics in daily life, stressing the need to change mentalities. Policy makers expected civil society organizations to screen their policy making and to contribute to it by making concrete policy recommendations and by supporting them while implementing these.

#### *Information and consultation*

During the interviews, policy actors admitted that consulting (central) civil society organizations at the start of policy making is difficult because EO policy making does not allow for the slow decision making processes in the women's and LGB movements. Respondents from the central organizations commented that the consultation by policy makers often happens in a rush, that it runs through

impersonal channels and that it doesn't take into account the organization's resources, producing little result. Grassroot organizations felt neglected and stressed the need for a pro-active stance to be heard by policy makers.

Although the survey found no significant differences in women's and LGB organizations' evaluation of the information from and the consultation by policy makers, respondents in the follow-up study commented that LGB organizations ought to be less content than women's organizations and put to the fore several reasons for this. Firstly, women's organizations are much more institutionalised than the LGB movement that is made up of many (semi-)voluntary organizations. Woodward (2000: 383) puts this as follows: "Those who are to have a voice increasingly must be those who are available during working hours". Secondly, the women's movement has two central organizations – the Dutch speaking Women's Council and the Women's Consultation Committee -, whereas the LGB movement only has one (the LGB Federation). Two central organizations can complement each other provided that one operates as a think tank that takes critical standpoints whereas the other is in a good position to negotiate with the policy makers over the issues that were raised. Thirdly, gender is thought of as a bigger EO policy priority than sexual orientation (Godemont & Motmans, 2006).

### 2.3 Civil society and research

Wiercx & Woodward (2004) studied the frequency of relations with researchers and civil society actors' evaluation of these relations. The survey indicated that European organizations were more likely than Flemish ones to have contacts with academics, and that women's organizations were more likely to make use of academic research than those in the LGB movement. They found a difference in evaluation of these contacts according to the policy level, with European organizations being more positive in their evaluation than Flemish organizations, and according to the target group, with women's organizations being more positive in their evaluation than LGB organizations.

In the follow-up study (Godemont & Motmans, 2006), LGB civil society actors stressed that they were glad LGB research was becoming more structurally imbedded in academic research. We asked respondents what they understood to be the role of the different actors in the velvet triangle with regard to EO research. The civil society actors and policy makers expect researchers to gather and disseminate scientific knowledge on EO and target groups, in order to legitimate their own actions. Women's organizations stressed the need for more involvement of civil society actors in research, the LGB organizations commented that popularisation of research was needed. Civil society actors described themselves as partners in, watchdogs over, respondents and/or consumers of, research. They considered the mainstreaming and disseminating of research as one of the main tasks for policy makers.

### 2.4 The velvet triangle?

The follow-up study (Godemont & Motmans, 2006) explored whether triangle constellations exist within the women's and LGB movements in the field of EO. The findings of the network analysis

seemed to support the existence of these models. The findings on strategies for policy influencing, which we will discuss later in this paper (§4), further substantiate this presumption. However, trans-issue and transnational relations remain rather rare, limited to the institutionalised umbrella organizations at the Flemish and the European level.

When asked about the concept and model of the velvet triangle, some interesting visions came to the foreground during the interviews. Respondents noticed that the triangle constellation in EO policy is a three-dimensional one, with triangles on every policy level (local, national, and global) interacting with each other. Informal networks were considered very important. The media were identified as a fourth cluster of actors, which was localised at the centre of the triangle. Cross-connections between triangles exist on every policy domain. Civil servants placed themselves as go-betweens on the axis civil society – policy. Participants in the focus groups considered the triangle constellation as ideal-typical, presenting numerous flaws, such as the top losing touch with the base, and the structure being vulnerable to shifts in the political composition of Ministries.

In conclusion, we can say that the triangle model is present in both women's and LGB movements. The personal networks, the informal character of contacts, and the flexibility of the model become even clearer when strategies for policy influencing are considered (see §4).

### **3. Ideas and concepts**

The survey (Wiercx & Woodward, 2004) explored the familiarity, the use, the interpretation and the application of some typical but recent EO-concepts, namely "mainstreaming" and "diversity". The follow-up study (Godemont & Motmans, 2006) further elaborated these aspects. We were particularly interested in the dissemination of these concepts and the consensus in visions about them, and in their impact on EO-thinking among respondents.

#### **3.1 Mainstreaming**

##### *Familiarity and use*

The survey (Wiercx & Woodward, 2004) showed that the concept "mainstreaming" was familiar to the majority of Flemish women's organizations, whereas in the LGB movement not even 50% of organizations knew the term. On the European level mainstreaming as a concept formed part of most organizations' jargon. The follow-up study (Godemont & Motmans, 2006) demonstrated that the notion is known mainly by those organizations that regularly keep in touch with policy makers or with women's organizations (and/or have engaged in the feminist world).

Apart from being more familiar with the concept mainstreaming, women's organizations use the term more frequently than their LGB counterparts, even more on the European than on the Flemish level. In Flanders, civil society organizations speak of mainstreaming more frequently in policy influencing than in their public relations (Wiercx & Woodward, 2004). The follow-up study (Godemont & Motmans, 2006) confirmed the findings of the survey. Respondents considered the concept mainstreaming as technical jargon, and used it mainly internally in their own organizations and in contact with policy

makers. They commented that the term is increasingly used without the prefix “gender” (Woodward, 2006).

#### *Interpretation and application*

Wiercx & Woodward (2004) did not present a definition of mainstreaming in the questionnaire since they presumed this concept, central to the EO-thinking, to be known by the organizations included in the survey. Indeed, the definition of the Council of Europe, which sees mainstreaming as the horizontally inserting or monitoring of issues in diverse policy domains, appeared to be well established among respondents in the interviews and focus groups (Godemont & Motmans, 2006).

What the survey already demonstrated, the follow-up study (Godemont & Motmans, 2006) confirmed: EO organizations’ interpretation of mainstreaming shows a focus on their own target group, be it women or LGB’s. Mainstreaming appeared to be “for everybody, but not necessarily for each other” (Woodward, 2006). To counter this “own target group first” thinking, the Flemish EO policy makers discarded the notion of gender mainstreaming, and focused more on vulnerable subgroups within the target groups (e.g. migrant LGB’s) (Godemont & Motmans, 2006). In the follow-up study (Godemont & Motmans, 2006), respondents stressed that one should mainstream whenever possible, but that a separate approach for different target groups remained necessary. Moreover, they commented that mainstreaming isn’t possible unless tangible measures are taken and an official watchdog is assigned. Representatives from Flemish government and administration stressed the importance of policy recommendations to mainstream LGB or women’s issues in specific policy domains. They regretted the lack of input coming from civil society actors in this matter.

Although the majority of organizations saw mainstreaming as a priority (for their own target group), an integral approach rarely occurred, with a limited amount of policy domains being followed up (Wiercx & Woodward, 2004).

### 3.2 Diversity

#### *Familiarity and use*

Unsurprisingly the vast majority of organizations are familiar with the notion of diversity (Wiercx & Woodward, 2004). The concept is primarily known as a ‘word’ in everyday speech, not necessarily as a policy concept (Woodward, 2006).

The survey (Wiercx & Woodward, 2004) demonstrated only minor differences in the use of the concept according to policy level and target group. The respondents in the interviews and focus groups reported that they used the term frequently in their contacts with policy makers, their target group and the general public (Godemont & Motmans, 2006). What can be said about the interpretation of diversity, an umbrella term par excellence?

#### *Interpretation and application*

In the follow-up study (Godemont & Motmans, 2006), respondents defined diversity as acknowledging differences within target groups or - more broadly - in social life choices.

Wiercx & Woodward (2004) found that LGB organizations were more eager about striving for diversity than women's organizations, both in Flanders (73% as opposed to 52%) and on a European level. Intersectional thinking, interpreted as the focus on vulnerable subgroups within target groups, was often cited when asked how to put diversity into practice. However, no unified perspective about the implications of intersectionality seemed to exist (Woodward, 2006).

### 3.3 Dissemination and consensus in visions

Both concepts, mainstreaming and diversity, are products of recent transnational processes<sup>11</sup> and result from top down discourse developments in politics. The notions have flown through in the Flemish network of civil society organizations mainly because the Flemish government and the administration itself was pro-active in adding the issues of diversity and mainstreaming, coming from the European level, in several new places in administration<sup>12</sup>. The respondents in the follow-up study judged these theoretical openings as fruitful, even though no unified perspective on the implications for EO policy existed. However, several civil society actors stressed the importance of the co-ownership of concepts (Woodward, 2006).

LGB and women's organizations clearly had different priorities with regard to mainstreaming and diversity: whereas the former welcomed diversity with open arms and showed little familiarity with the mainstreaming notion, the latter prioritized the mainstreaming approach and pointed out the dangers of both concepts. Although, a shared vision on mainstreaming and diversity within the target group was presumed by civil society actors, some fault lines appeared. The Expertise Centre on Migrant Girls and Women (Steunpunt Allochtone Meisjes en Vrouwen, SAMV) was concerned that mainstreaming was difficult to rhyme with diversity thinking. This group also put the finger on the painful spot, arguing that the conceptual framework of gender mainstreaming neglects the notion of race and ethnicity in almost all its formulations (Godemont & Motmans, 2006).

All respondents regretted the lack of discussion on the theory and practice of mainstreaming and diversity with other civil society actors and policy makers<sup>13</sup>. One respondent put it as follows:

*What happened with gender mainstreaming and diversity [concepts that were brought back to meaningless jargon] is likely to happen to intersectional thinking too (focus group women).*

Now a paradoxical situation exists. On the one hand, civil society actors are condemning the strict framework set out by policy makers for organizations, and the need to change their vocabulary in tune with the policy jargon of the current minister. On the other hand, the Flemish policy makers are regretting the lack of useful and applicable input with respect to policy content by these same actors (Godemont & Motmans, 2006).

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<sup>11</sup> Whereas the UNO and NGO's have been important actors in the coining of the concept "(gender) mainstreaming", the notions "diversity" and "diversity management" – often cited in one breath – originated in the American business life.

<sup>12</sup> The Flemish administration put considerable effort in disseminating the Council of Europe's definition of mainstreaming and its related documents. Diversity was a key concept in the policy document of the current Minister for EO (2004-2009).

<sup>13</sup> Until 2003 the administration of the Flemish EO Ministry organized a Forum for all civil society organizations it structurally subsidized. Administration now chooses to build bilateral contacts with these different organizations.

### 3.4 The evolution of EO-thinking

In the interviews and focus groups, respondents gave their vision on the evolution in EO-thinking, highlighting some of the positive and negative aspects they encountered.

The expansion of policy domains in which EO-policy ought to be applied (mainstreaming) was underlined, but several dangers of the diversity discourse were pointed out. First, the backlash of gender was put to the foreground by the women's organizations. The implications of the diversity strategy were seen in terms of marking women as 'minorities', so that women are only a target group if they are in a situation of a multiple disadvantaged position (Woodward, 2006). A second problem is the so-called "benchmarking fallacy", i.e. the striving after numbers (quantitative equality) while there is no thought about the underlying power structures (qualitative equality). Finally, several respondents regretted the recent policy focus on subgroups within target groups. This, so they commented, was at the cost of the recognition of structural problems for the target group as a whole.

Intersectional thinking, seen as an approach to realize diversity, was often cited, but respondents raised several concerns. Especially when it entailed a hierarchy in inequalities, the alarm bell was rung. LGB civil society actors considered the women's movement claim that gender had hierarchical priority, as very unsolidary. Moreover, respondents commented that intersectional thinking was often limited to the addition, instead of inclusion, of new groups. The operation of turning the mirror to the position of privilege (for instance whiteness) was seen as a possible solution for the "add-and-stir-approach".

When asked about the relation between mainstreaming and diversity, most respondents agreed that it was diversity that had to be mainstreamed, or rather that the concept diversity is necessary to know what one needs to mainstream (Woodward, 2006). Flemish EO policy makers use the "Open Method of Coordination" (OMC)<sup>14</sup> as a steering mechanism to mainstream diversity.

## 4. Strategies

Wiercx & Woodward (2004) defined strategies broadly in the survey. They explored three aspects: the distribution of organizations' resources among different activities (policy influencing, service provision, public relations and fund-raising), the strategies they use for policy influencing; and, Europe as a political opportunity structure for Flemish civil society organizations. The follow-up study (Godemont & Motmans, 2006) analysed these issues in-depth and paid attention to good strategies for influencing policy among respondents.

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<sup>14</sup> The open method of coordination or OMC is a relatively new and intergovernmental means of governance in the European Union, based on the voluntary cooperation of its member states. The open method rests on soft law mechanisms such as guidelines and indicators, benchmarking and sharing of best practice. This means that there are no official sanctions for laggards. Rather, the method's effectiveness relies on a form of peer pressure and naming and shaming (Wikipedia, [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Open\\_Method\\_of\\_Coordination](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Open_Method_of_Coordination)).

### *The distribution of resources*

In general, organizations spent the bulk of their resources on service provision, aimed at their members (individuals and/or organizations), and policy influencing (Wiercx & Woodward, 2004). In the follow-up study (Godemont & Motmans, 2006), civil society actors commented that the resources spent on policy influencing fluctuated with political developments<sup>15</sup>. The follow-up study (Godemont & Motmans, 2006) demonstrated that mainly central organizations give priority to policy influencing. This is connected with their large scale and high degree of institutionalization. They have the time and the staff to devote to policy influencing.

### *The strategies*

In the survey, Wiercx & Woodward (2004) explored what type of strategies, radical or moderate ones<sup>16</sup>, organizations use. Based on their literature study on social movements, they presumed that the scale of an organization and its developmental phase are directive for the type of strategies used. They posited that small-scaled organizations, which form the majority in Flanders (64% in the survey), are inclined to use radical strategies, because they are structured in an egalitarian way. Moreover, they expected a more radical stance from LGB organizations, because they aren't yet as institutionalized as women's organizations. However, neither of these hypotheses was confirmed in the survey.

According to Wiercx & Woodward (2004), these results indicate that the Flemish model of EO policy making is a pacified one. An assertion the respondents in the follow-up study (Godemont & Motmans, 2006) agreed with. Through the subsidizing of organizations concerned with EO, government creates an asymmetrical dependency. Most organizations found this problematical, but did not see a solution in the policy structure as it is now. "One isn't inclined to bite the hand that feeds", is how one of the respondents voiced the overall attitude. The Women's Consultation Committee and several grass roots organizations refused to be incorporated into EO policy and took a critical stance. Apart from the pacification model, respondents saw other explanations for the whining of radical strategies. Firstly, the lack of common goals in social movements was signalled in the women's movement. Secondly, the difficulties in mobilising people to take part in demonstrations was linked to the professionalization, of both the organization and of their members.

In the follow-up study (Godemont & Motmans, 2006), respondents described new 'radical' strategies, such as the use of the media (for press releases and conferences), and the use of research findings. They also stressed the importance of organizing big events on a yearly basis that attract a lot of media-interest (e.g. the LGB parade, the National Women's Day). Respondents agreed that, ideally, organizations use a mix of moderate and radical strategies.

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<sup>15</sup> Wiercx & Woodward (2004) gathered their survey data at the end of the term of the previous Minister of EO, the follow-up study (Godemont & Motmans, 2006) was carried out at the beginning of the term of the current Minister.

<sup>16</sup> Wiercx & Woodward (2004) oppose radical strategies, such as sit-ins, manifestations, and graffiti, to moderate strategies, such as participating in advisory boards and commissions, lobbying, informing and so on.

What is the best way to influence policy (makers) according to the respondents in the follow-up study? Firstly, an organization has to select the right actors to work with (“It’s not what you know, it is who you know”). Secondly, an organization has to ‘impose’ itself upon relevant allies by practicing a politics of attendance. Next, an organization is to inform the chosen allies pro-actively and on a very regular basis. This should all be done by using a mix of strategies (radical and moderate), in both a formal and informal way. The importance of informal networks in policy influencing was stressed by both women’s and LGB movements. Representatives of these movements mentioned the existence of an “old girls network”, and of a “pink network” by analogy with the “old boys network” (Godemont & Motmans, 2006).

Overall, the respondents in the follow-up study (Godemont & Motmans, 2006) commented that there exists little attuning about strategies, neither within nor between target groups. They did not find this problematic. Moreover, strategies did not differ from one policy level to another. A subsidiarity principle (see §2.2) was at work; in the LGB movement, even a “gentlemen’s agreement” existed, with the LGB Federation operating on the Flemish policy level and the regional platforms operating on the regional level. Women’s organizations mentioned the political variety in their movement as an inhibiting factor for strategic deliberation, a problem the LGB movement did not mention.

#### *Europe as a political opportunity structure*

Wiercx & Woodward (2004) ascertained whether Flemish civil society organizations consider the European level important to meet their demands<sup>17</sup>. They concluded that Flemish organizations are well aware of the importance of the European and the international context, and the opportunities these offer for the EO thematic. Nevertheless, the interest among Flemish organizations does not translate itself in transnational contacts, the central organizations being a bit more active than smaller organizations though (see §2.1). In the follow-up study, Godemont & Motmans (2006) explored these findings and searched for explanations.

In the European context, Belgium pursues a progressive course regarding the opportunity dimension of sexual orientation. As a result, LGB civil society actors sometimes deliberately opt not to involve European policy makers, because this might weaken their standpoint. For the opportunity dimension of gender, the European Union has clearly done a lot of pioneering work. Nonetheless, for most civil society actors – even within the women’s movement - Europe remains abstract, and of little support. Those who would like to get involved more on the European level, do not because of limited resources. In the meanwhile, they put their trust in the central organizations to keep track of the European EO policy, but because of the bottleneck-effect, little information reaches them and when it does, it is often too late to be useful (see §2.1).

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<sup>17</sup> Wiercx & Woodward (2004) advanced three positions to study Flemish organizations’ strategical vision on Europe: 1. Our organisation is mainly oriented towards the situation in Flanders, 2. The global context (EU and/or UNO) influences our functioning, 3. International cooperation is the future goal for women’s and LGB organizations.

## 5. Conclusion

Both the survey (Wiercx & Woodward, 2004) and the follow-up study (Godemont & Motmans, 2006) are indicative for the existence of a triangle constellation in Flemish EO policy making, and show traits that are characteristic to the model: a pacification model, informal contacts and flexible collaborations. Moreover, the follow-up study added the media as a fourth, centrally located, actor to the triangle. The structure for EO policy making was described as multi-layered with different policy levels, forming part of a larger constellation with triangles for each policy domain. However, respondents commented that the triangle constellation is ideal-typical, being elitist and vulnerable to shifts in power relations. Trans-issue and transnational contacts are rather rare. A better flow through of trans-issue and transnational impulses from the civil society and policy actors, might equip Flemish civil society better to cope with the challenges of new frameworks for EO (Woodward, 2006).

The concepts "mainstreaming" and "diversity" have recently flown through from the European to the Flemish level. Although the notions are well known by civil society actors and policy makers, different interpretations exist. The issues of diversity and mainstreaming are the products of top down and politically steered processes. Welcomed as theoretical revelations, there seems to be no consensus (so far) on the implications of these ideas for EO policy making.

The strategies civil society actors use to influence policy makers, fit in the velvet triangle picture, being mostly moderate and thus aimed at pacification. There is little attuning of strategies amongst target groups, and the European level remains virgin territory as for now.

In conclusion, Flemish EO policy making shows some of the characteristics of the velvet triangle model (informal, flexible, pacified), but remains ideal-typical with regard to others (trans-issue and transnational contact).

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