

**NO WOMAN'S LAND:
THE CONSTITUTIVE EFFECTS OF DISCOURSES
ON GENDER INEQUALITY IN GERMAN
AGRICULTURAL POLICY**

A poststructural policy analysis

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ABSTRACT

Across the European Union (EU) and its member states, policies fail to appropriately address gendered experiences of discrimination in agriculture, reinforcing gender inequities and power imbalances that facilitate and reproduce men's privileged access to and authority over agricultural spaces. This research interrogates the constitutive effects of discourses on gender (in)equality in the German National Strategic Plan (NSP) as the national translation of EU Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) by examining how gender inequality is represented as a 'problem', and what subjectification effects are created through the identified problem representations. The analysis is based on the 'What's the problem represented to be?' approach developed by Carol Bacchi. The findings show that, despite a complex and layered representation of gender inequality as a 'problem', women's lacking economic participation in rural areas is at the core of the interrogated policy discourse. Embedded in a broader postfeminist discourse and the economisation of EU gender equality efforts, the policy's promotion of women's non-agricultural entrepreneurship as the central strategy for addressing gender inequality constructs women as rural entrepreneurs and autonomous economic subjects. Their performance of agricultural labour is invisibilised by the production of distinct categories of the masculine space within agriculture and the female space outside of agriculture. The findings challenge the perceived status of policies as reactive to a 'problem' and show that, in the case of the German NSP, the implicit problem representations of gender inequality in agriculture have constitutive effects. Therefore, to address gender-based discrimination in agriculture and renegotiate gender relations at the policy level, EU agricultural policies need to be recognised as productive practices and power relations need to be identified and challenged.

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ABBREVIATIONS

AGRI	Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development
BMEL	Bundesministerium für Ernährung und Landwirtschaft (Federal Ministry of Food and Agriculture)
CAP	Common Agricultural Policy
CDG	Civil Dialogue Group
EAFRD	European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development
EAGF	European Agricultural Guarantee Fund
EU	European Union
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
FEMM	Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality
GDR	German Democratic Republic
NSP	National Strategic Plan
SO	Specific Objective
WPR	What's the problem represented to be?

PREFACE

This thesis is a product of many things. It certainly is the product of a balancing act between ambitions, boundaries, and needs. It is also the product of a process of re-discovering confidence and trust in myself, my abilities and my values. This would not have been possible if it wasn't also the product of a shared adventure. I like to think that I would have had enough courage to start exploring this process and the topics of this thesis on my own, and maybe I would have. But - especially since we are expected to be independent and brave, resourceful and ambitious, proud and confident (but humble, of course) - I am glad that I had the privilege to explore the topic, the questions, the process, and all the associated uncertainties and emotions, in a co-creative process with a friend/co-writer/neighbour/writing-retreat-colleague/discussion-partner/you-got-this-sayer. I am glad that this thesis is also the product of my collaboration with Clara Lina Bader. We initially planned to write our thesis together and handed in a shared proposal, but soon realised that our interests, ideas, and passions slightly drifted in different directions, resulting in two individual theses. However, this means that for our initial work - finding and engaging with literature, exploring different directions, discussing ideas, and especially writing the proposal - Clara deserves as much credit as I do. It also means that large parts of the introductory chapters 1 and 2 of this thesis are co-written and/or co-researched and are likely overlap with Clara's thesis, which is yet to be finalised. All other parts of this thesis are researched and written by me alone.

1 INTRODUCTION

“EU institutions are battlegrounds for norms, and gender norms are part of the discursive power battle” (Kantola & Lombardo, 2018, p. 345)

The European Union (EU) has long recognised the importance of addressing gender inequalities at a policy level and is legally committed to improving gender equality through gender mainstreaming, i.e. the integration of a gender perspective into all policies, since 1997 (“TFEU”, 2012, art. 8). While this presents an important achievement in the fight against gender-based discrimination, policies as governing practices and processes in the EU are shaped by power relations between different institutions and governance levels that construct issues, such as gender inequality, in particular ways (Kantola & Lombardo, 2018). Contestations between actors, policy sectors, and developments over time shape the ways in which gender inequality is thought about, represented, and approached, how and which objectives are set, how they are measured, and who is included and excluded by specific policies (Kantola & Lombardo, 2018). Conflicting discourses that problematise issues differently are continuously played out in EU policymaking, highlighting specific representations while silencing others.

Scholars have notably criticised how the feminist perspectives on gender mainstreaming that EU gender equality efforts are rooted in are reduced to symbolic attempts to maintain the status quo, prioritising neoliberal interests and economic growth over the importance of addressing power relations for reaching gender equality goals (Benschop & Verloo, 2006; Elomäki, 2015, 2023; Lombardo & Meier, 2006; Rönnblom, 2009; Squires, 2005; Walby, 2005). Such “economisation” (Elomäki, 2023, p. 323) of gender equality governance within EU institutions reduces women to individual economic subjects and frames gender-based inequalities within market-oriented discourses that simplify and depoliticise conceptualisations of gender inequality, hindering the transformative potential of feminist objectives (Benschop & Verloo, 2006; Elomäki, 2015, 2023; Kantola & Lombardo, 2018; Prügl, 2015; Rönnblom, 2009).

In the context of economic discourses and gender equality, the EU’s Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) arises as a particularly relevant case. Gender inequalities in agriculture have been neglected at the policy level despite a striking persistence of patriarchal structures in the sector

and, similar to other policy areas, efforts to address gender inequalities prioritise the economic integration of women over challenging power imbalances (Arora-Jonsson & Leder, 2020; Bock, 2015; Shortall & Bock, 2015). Arora-Jonsson and Leder (2020, p. 19) argue that:

gender mainstreaming has not meant thinking through of structures that cause gendered inequalities but that it has merely entailed adding women to current unequal structures devised by others than themselves. More specifically, gender mainstreaming becomes a case of women being mainstreamed into markets.

Further, the exceptional status of the CAP as the biggest EU funding programme and the extensive influence of the policy on the governance of agriculture, rural development, and natural resource management demonstrate the importance of scrutinising the dominant discourses it is embedded in (Feindt, 2018). Since its introduction in 1962, the CAP has been a site for discursive battles that shape agricultural and rural spaces and relations in the EU and its member States (Feindt, 2018). With the latest CAP reform in 2021, gender relations have received more focused attention as gender equality was integrated into the policy framework's objectives for the first time ("Regulation (EU) 2021/2115", 2021). However, prominent productivist and economic discourses marginalise equality efforts and drastically limit opportunities for policy measures and objectives that address power relations and challenge discrimination against women farmers¹ associated with patriarchal structures (Erjavec & Erjavec, 2020; Erjavec et al., 2009; Prügl, 2011b, 2012; Shortall, 2015). It is extensively researched how agricultural production is built on patriarchal structures that maintain traditional gender roles, favouring the possibilities and opportunities for male farmers while restricting those for women (Ball, 2020; Brandth, 2002; Shortall, 2014; Shortall & Marangudakis, 2022; Smyth et al., 2018; Whitley & Brasier, 2020).

¹ In EU gender and agricultural policy gender-based discrimination is mainly discussed as affecting women, and gender equality is understood as equality between men and women. The lived experiences of gender-diverse people in farming and in rural areas are substantially disregarded and invisibilised. While there is a large body of (scientific) literature on women in agriculture, literature on gender-diverse people in agriculture is only slowly emerging in the EU context (Pfammatter & Jongerden, 2023; Raj, 2024), with more extensive research from the United States (i.e., Hoffmeyer, 2020, 2021; Leslie, 2019). Since I engage with and investigate discourses on "gender equality" in EU and German agricultural policy, I continue to use the term, as it is the term employed in the analysed policy as well as related documents.

Thus, across the EU and its member states, policy and its decision-making processes fail to appropriately address gendered experiences of discrimination in agriculture, reinforcing gender inequities and power imbalances that facilitate and reproduce men's privileged access to and authority over agricultural spaces. With the exceptional status of agricultural policy in the EU and the complex societal norms and biases facing women in agriculture, the EU's commitment to gender equality requires special attention to be paid to the ways in which the CAP (re-)produces gendered effects (Ball, 2020). With the novel introduction of 'National Strategic Plans' (NSP) as member states' tailored translations of EU CAP regulations into national contexts, the centre of contestations around gender equality is shifted from the EU to the national level. While the discursive landscape remains complex and deeply embedded in EU policymaking processes and relations, the way gender equality is represented as a problem is largely constructed on a national level, producing differing effects between member states (European Commission: Agrosynergy and Directorate-General for Agriculture and Rural Development et al., 2023).

In this thesis, I investigate the discourses on gender equality in EU agricultural policy using the example of the German NSP. I critically scrutinise how gender inequality is represented as a 'problem' and interrogate the constitutive effects of the identified problematisation(s). The aim of this research is to highlight the constitutive power of policies and embedded problem representations to challenge taken-for-granted truths in their formulation and quest for problem-solving. I would also like to invite the reader to reflect on the ways in which the kind of (re-)thinking employed in this thesis may challenge their own assumptions about what constitutes a 'problem' and how this can be helpful for their work and everyday life.

The following research and sub-research questions guide my analysis:

RQ - What are the constitutive effects of the discourses on gender inequality in the German National Strategic Plan?

SRQ1 - How is gender inequality represented as a 'problem'?

SRQ2 - What kind of specific subjects are created through these problem representations?

In the following chapters, I provide a more in-depth overview of the context of this thesis both at the EU as well as German level by presenting existing literature on relevant topics. I first introduce the supra-national context (chapter 2), addressing gender inequality in agriculture in the EU (chapter 2.1), followed by a brief overview of the EU's gender equality architecture (chapter 2.2). I then focus more specifically on the CAP and the recent efforts for the inclusion of gender equality goals (chapter 2.3). Moving on to the case study context on the national level (chapter 3), I provide an overview of the state of gender inequality specifically in agriculture in Germany (chapter 3.1) and present how the gender equality objectives defined at the EU level are implemented in the German NSP (chapter 3.2).

After introducing the context of this thesis, I elaborate on the theory that forms the basis of my research, presenting the framework I draw on and defining related concepts (chapter 4). This is followed by the presentation of my methodology (chapter 5), where I introduce the German NSP as the policy text that I analyse, describe the collection of data (chapter 5.1) and how I approach the analysis of the data (chapter 5.2). I also address my positionality in relation to this thesis (chapter 5.3). Finally, I present and discuss the results (chapter 6), explore the limitations of my research (chapter 7) and draw final conclusions (chapter 8).

2 EU GENDER EQUALITY GOVERNANCE AND THE CAP

2.1 Inequality between genders in agriculture

“How can gender inequality be promoted in an industry that is intrinsically premised on the exploitation of women’s (family) labour?” (Shortall & Bock, 2015, p. 664)

In a recent report, the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations (FAO) highlighted the widespread and systemic gender inequalities in agricultural practices. The report shows that worldwide, men working in agri-food systems are in more powerful positions than women regarding, amongst others, land ownership, access to resources, income, and food security (FAO, 2023). Although discourses on gender inequalities in agriculture are largely focused on countries in the global south, EU agriculture, too, is facing structural discrimination based on gender.

In the EU, on average 31.6 % (data from 2020) of farm managers are women, although there are large regional differences, as well as different legal concepts of farm ownership (e.g. co-ownership) that may skew the data, since EU statistics require the reporting of individual farm managers (European Institute for Gender Equality, 2024). In the Netherlands, for example, co-ownership can be registered, but men tend to be chosen as representative managers for official EU reports. This invisibilises cases in which women are farm managers in formally legal equal partnerships with men, resulting in a share of only 5% of women farm managers in the Netherlands in EU reports, instead of an estimated 28% if women as co-owners are included (Welink, 2021).

With on average two-thirds of men as farm managers in the EU, they are the main beneficiaries of agricultural subsidies, especially since direct payments, largely based on farm size, account for over 70% of the CAP budget, and the average farm size managed by men is larger than that of women (European Institute for Gender Equality, 2017; European Parliament, 2023). Overall, the share of women as farm managers declines with increasing farm size (European Institute for Gender Equality, 2024).

Lacking accessibility, and thus ownership, of agricultural land is considered the root cause of gender inequality in agriculture (Arora-Jonsson & Leder, 2020; Shortall, 2015). Although EU member states have differing legal inheritance frameworks, women in the EU remain less likely than men to inherit and take over the management of farms in most countries (Ball, 2020; Shortall, 2015). Further, patrilineal inheritance patterns reinforce the perception of agriculture as a male domain, and identifying as a farmer is closely tied to the ownership of land (Whitley & Brasier, 2020).

Despite changes in how women perceive their role on farms through more active and visible participation in agricultural labour in the last decades, their identification as ‘helpers’ and ‘farmwives’ is still widely prevalent (Shortall, 2014; Whitley & Brasier, 2020). This carries implications for the division of labour on farms as women are carrying the majority of unpaid reproductive work on top of on- and off-farm labour to add to the farm income. Their participation in on-farm decision-making is invisibilised, further harming women’s access to financial and educational resources (Shortall, 2015; Whitley & Brasier, 2020). Additionally, the ways in which

women farm differently, for example commitment to alternative or ecologically friendly practices and income diversification, are not recognised (Ball, 2020; Diamanti & Duncan, 2023).

Closely linked to on-farm identities is the role of the family and the notion of the family farm. Family farms are defined as farms on which family members provide the majority of agricultural labour, and in 2020, 95% of farms in the EU were considered family farms (Eurostat, 2024). In most of the existing literature, the family farm is a heteronormative idea, in which feminine and masculine work identities exist, respectively performed by women and men (Shortall, 2014). Besides the (re-)production of the image of the ‘male’ farmer and ‘female’ housewife (Brandth, 2002), this heteronormative understanding of the family presumes binary gender identities that fit the categories of ‘men’ and ‘women’ and, although Shortall (2014) argues that gender and work identities are dynamic, diverse genders are not considered. With the EU’s commitment to the family farm, it is a discourse that remains relevant (Shortall, 2014, 2015).

2.2 EU gender equality architecture

“The Union is founded on the values of respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights, including the rights of persons belonging to minorities. These values are common to the Member States in a society in which pluralism, non-discrimination, tolerance, justice, solidarity and equality between women and men prevail.”
(“TEU”, 2016, art. 2)

In the past decades, the EU has made numerous attempts at addressing (gender) inequalities through the integration of equality as a right and objective within different parts of the EU policy architecture. However, the language used to describe inequalities, and thus, who is included in and excluded, is superficial and inconsistent, and at times, contradictory.

Since 1957 the EU has been undertaking efforts to tackle existing inequalities between genders with the integration of equal pay for equal work into the Treaty of Rome² (“Treaty establishing the European Economic Community”, 1957, art. 119). About 40 years later, in 1995 at the

² Since 2009 called the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU). It serves as the legal basis of the European Union, together with the Treaty on European Union (TEU).

Beijing Platform for Action, the Union committed to gender mainstreaming, the incorporation of a gender perspective into all policies, and two years later integrating into its primary law that “in all its activities, the Union shall aim to eliminate inequalities, and to promote equality, between men and women” (“TFEU”, 2012, art. 8).

In 2000, the European Commission, Council of the EU, and Parliament declared the Charter of Fundamental Rights (“Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union”, 2000). Setting the fundamental rights of all EU citizens, it applies to all member states and European institutions and serves as EU primary law, next to the EU treaties. The Charter’s third title (Equality) stipulates non-discrimination based on, amongst others, sex (art. 21) and equality between men and women (art. 23).

In 2020, under the first Commissioner for Equality, the Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025 was launched (European Commission, 2020a). It is the second strategy of its kind, after the Strategy for Equality 2010-2015 (European Commission, 2011) and sets objectives to tackle different areas and aspects of gender inequality, such as gender-based violence, discrimination based on sex and structural inequalities to foster:

A Europe, where women and men, girls and boys, in all their diversity, are equal. Where they are free to pursue their chosen path in life, where they have equal opportunities to thrive, and where they can equally participate in and lead our European society (European Commission, 2020a, p. 2)

The Strategy follows a dual approach to gender equality that combines specific measures to target inequality and gender mainstreaming. Further, it takes an intersectional perspective that acknowledges the diverse experiences of discrimination based on gender as they intersect with other personal characteristics and identities. While the definition of gender used in the strategy is binary and only represents men and women, an attempt is made to include gender diversity by considering men and women as “heterogeneous categories” with varying gender identities and expressions (European Commission, 2020a, p. 2). This attempt at inclusivity, however, fails to actively address discrimination against people who are excluded by a gender (and sex) binary, such as non-binary or gender-diverse, intersex and trans people, although an LGBTIQ Equality

Strategy was launched by the European Commission in the same year (European Commission, 2020b).

Despite these longstanding efforts to address gender-based discrimination in EU policymaking, agricultural policy has remained particularly resistant to the inclusion of gender perspectives (Prügl, 2012; Shortall, 2015; Shortall & Marangudakis, 2024).

2.3 Gender equality and the CAP

2.3.1 *The CAP as an exceptional policy*

The main policy framework for regulating and organising EU agriculture is the CAP. It was first launched in 1962, with the main objectives of providing affordable food for EU citizens, a fair standard of living for farmers, increasing productivity, and stabilising markets, as set out in EU primary law (“TFEU”, 2012, art. 39). Since then, it has undergone six changes in objectives and their implementation. The most recent CAP was adopted in December 2021 and enacted on the 1st of January 2023 (European Council and the Council of the European Union, 2025). It is covered by three regulations (“Regulation (EU) 2021/2115”, 2021; “Regulation (EU) 2021/2116”, 2021; “Regulation (EU) 2021/2117”, 2021). The most recent reform allows member states greater flexibility to decide on specific measures for regional differences by translating the regulations into NSPs. Thus, the NSPs must align with the ten key policy objectives³, translated into 44 common result indicators. The current CAP is a central part of implementing the European Green Deal, including the Farm to Fork strategy, a possible ‘game-changer’ if political challenges can be overcome (Schebesta & Candel, 2020). However, farmers’ protests in early 2024 led to the adoption of short- and medium-term measures and eventually a review and subsequent amendment of the CAP in May 2024, weakening environmental requirements (European Council and the Council of the European Union, 2025).

³ 1. to ensure a fair income for farmers; 2. to increase competitiveness; 3. to improve the position of farmers in the food chain; 4. climate change action; 5. environmental care; 6. to preserve landscapes and biodiversity; 7. to support generational renewal; 8. vibrant rural areas; 9. to protect food and health quality; 10. fostering knowledge and innovation (European Commission, 2025b)

The current CAP (2023-2027) makes up 31% of the EU budget; nearly EUR 390 billion is allocated to the CAP for the multiannual financial framework 2021-2027, making it the most expensive policy of the EU (European Parliament, 2023). The sum is divided into two funds – the European Agricultural Guarantee Fund (EAGF), also known as direct payments per hectare or decoupled payments accounting for about 75% of the total amount, and the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD), also known as coupled payments to socio-economic and environmental requirements (European Parliament, 2023). It is exceptional not only in its financial proportions but also because the CAP development and negotiations differ from other EU policies in their legislative process and compartmentalised, sector-oriented institutions involved, e.g. the Special Committee on Agriculture, as well as substantial governmental interventions and powerful interest groups (Daugbjerg & Feindt, 2017; Skogstad, 1998). However, in the past decades the CAP has undergone post-exceptional transformations characterised by a partial de-compartmentalisation of the policy sector with new institutional arrangements and discourses on, for example, sustainability and globalisation (Daugbjerg & Feindt, 2017).

Key contributors to the CAP are the European Commission, represented by the Agriculture Commissioner, the Council of the EU, represented by the member states' agricultural ministers; and the European Parliament, represented by the parliament's agricultural committee, a negotiation also known as the 'trialogue'. Furthermore, there are regular consultations of civil dialogue groups (CDGs), e.g. in the form of CDGs on the CAP NSPs and Horizontal Matters, agricultural committees and the agricultural market task force (European Commission, 2025a). Interest groups representing non-production interests face severe barriers to the decision-making process (Matthews et al., 2023). The CAP and its negotiation process are highly complex and contested and not considered fit for purpose to fulfil its own objectives (Knickel et al., 2018; Lillemets et al., 2022; Martin & Fornabio, 2021; Pe'er et al., 2020; Scown & Nicholas, 2020).

2.3.2 *Gender equality in the CAP*

The EU's commitment to gender mainstreaming naturally applies to agricultural policy as well. However, gender equality has not been an explicit part of the CAP objectives until the latest reform (CAP 2023-2027). Still, the impact of this commitment and thus the incorporation of

a gender perspective into the CAP is questionable. Shortall (2015, p. 717) finds that within the CAP, “the stated commitment to gender mainstreaming is empty rhetoric” since, at best, symptoms instead of root causes of gender inequality in agriculture are addressed. Further, the tensions between agricultural and gender policies and power imbalances between actors hinder the promotion of gender equality goals through the CAP (Shortall, 2015; Shortall & Marangudakis, 2024). In line with these findings, a report from 2022 suggests that the CAP had a “likely but yet unclear impact on gender equality” in 2021 (European Commission: Directorate General for Budget, 2022, p. 78).

While gender mainstreaming is not legally binding for any policy area, the responsibilities are particularly unclear for the CAP since the last reform transferred more decision-making power to the member states through the development of CAP NSP. The question arises whether the European Commission or national governments are responsible for gender mainstreaming the CAP/NSPs. However, “Regulation (EU) 2021/2115” (2021, (33)) states:

Member States should be required to assess the situation of women in farming and address challenges in their CAP Strategic Plans. Gender equality should be an integral part of the preparation, implementation and evaluation of CAP interventions. Member States should also strengthen their capacity in gender mainstreaming and in the collection of data disaggregated by gender.

If and to what extent member states apply gender perspectives to their NSP is difficult to comprehend, and what effects the responsibility do so might have on gender equality in agriculture remains to be seen. Nevertheless, member states were required to include organisations representing gender equality and non-discrimination interests into the development of their NSP (“Regulation (EU) 2021/2115”, 2021, art. 106).

The governmental and non-governmental actors negotiating questions in relation to gender equality in the agricultural policy arena are, on one hand, EU institutions, like the Committee on Women’s Rights and Gender Equality (FEMM) and the Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development (AGRI), who developed a report on women in rural areas, which was adopted by the European Parliament in 2017 (European Parliament, 2018). The Parliament also issued and approved several reports regarding women in agriculture and rural areas and has been

pushing for better statistical data (Llobregat, 2018). Further, FEMM requested a study on the professional status of women in rural areas in 2019 (European Parliament: Directorate-General for Internal Policies of the Union et al., 2019) and provided opinions on different parts of the development process of the current CAP (2023-2027), e.g. on the regulation to support the development of NSPs (Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality, 2019). Interests of non-governmental organisations are represented within the CDGs as so-called expert groups, which might advocate for and offer advice on gender issues. Organisations that participated in the latest CDG on the CAP Strategic Plans and Horizontal Matters (European Commission, 2025c) with resources dedicated to questions of gender and/or women in agriculture are, for example, Agroecology Europe (Gender and Intersectionality working group), COPA-COGECA (Women's Committee), and the European Coordination of La Via Campesina (Women's articulation and Gender and sexual diversities articulation).

The growing attention given to women in agriculture and incorporation of gender equality goals into the CAP (2023-2027) is anchored in one of the ten specific objectives (SOs): “To promote employment, growth, gender equality, including the participation of women in farming, social inclusion and local development in rural areas, including the circular bio-economy and sustainable forestry” (SO8). The analytical framework developed to translate each SO into interventions and result indicators, however, fails to maintain gender equality as a priority for SO8. Next to the common objectives, in their individual needs assessments, only 8 member states indicate gender equality in their NSPs for SO8, one of which only mentioned it without the development of corresponding interventions (European Commission: Agrosynergy and Directorate-General for Agriculture and Rural Development et al., 2023). Thus, the extent to which inequalities between genders in agriculture are addressed, and the depth to which they are dealt with, is barely specified in the CAP, but is up to the member states individually, although NSPs need to be approved by the European Commission.

Recent developments show that the support of women farmers remains on the agricultural policy agenda. In a press release, EU agricultural representatives emphasised the importance of women for the future of agriculture and the viability of rural areas (Council of the European Union, 2024). Further, in their final report the Strategic Dialogue on the Future of EU Agriculture elaborated on the need to address gender inequality in agriculture and rural areas and put forward a list

of recommendations, including LGBTQIA+ people (*Strategic Dialogue on the Future of EU Agriculture*, 2024). The forum was launched in January 2024 by President von der Leyen to aid in the development of future agricultural policy and consists of 29 agri-food stakeholders. However, when the European Commission presented the Vision for Agriculture and Food that was informed by the Strategic Dialogue in February 2025, the recommendations were remarkably disregarded (European Commission: Directorate-General for Agriculture and Rural Development, 2025). A genuine examination of the underlying causes of inequality between genders in agriculture, as well as the power imbalances and discourses involved, is still lacking.

3 CASE STUDY: GERMANY

3.1 Gender inequality in German agriculture

The Federal Government has no information on gender stereotypes specifically occurring in agriculture.

Über speziell in der Landwirtschaft vorkommende Geschlechtsstereotypen liegen der Bundesregierung keine Informationen vor. (Deutscher Bundestag, 2019, p. 15)

The privileged position of men in the agricultural sector throughout the EU shows similar patterns in the German context, as access to and management of farms, the distribution of productive and reproductive labour, social security, and health and safety are unevenly distributed between genders alongside the widespread stereotyping and discrimination of women farmers. A study conducted in 2020 found that in Germany, one in three men has a closed anti-feminist or sexist worldview, as well as one in five women (Kalkstein et al., 2022). Gender stereotypes and traditional division of gender roles are particularly persistent in agriculture, as the sector continues to be male-dominated.

Despite the increasing visibility of the role of women in agriculture and a growing number of women taking on managing positions (Pieper et al., 2023), still, on average only 11% of farms in Germany are managed by women, (compared to 31% in the EU) (BMEL, 2024a). Yet, one

in three workers in agriculture is female and only a quarter of these are hired as permanent labour, while the large majority of women are working as family labour (41%) or seasonal labour (35%) (BMEL, 2024a). However, there are significant regional differences, especially between the federal states of former East and West Germany due to the remnants of post-World War II structural and cultural developments in agriculture.

*Nachkriegszeit*⁴ and the ‘lost generation’

While in former West Germany small to mid-sized farm structures facilitated the promotion of family farming, a narrative that was particularly strong in the 1950s and 60s, collectivisation under communism in the German Democratic Republic (GDR) created large agricultural cooperatives that served as the “political, economic, cultural and communal centre” (van Hoven, 2004, p. 127) where life was organised around work (Pfeffer, 1989; Prügl, 2011a). Work-related policies in the GDR brought about the widespread inclusion of women in the (skilled) labour force, and in the agricultural cooperatives many women were employed in stereotypically male, labour-intensive manual work (van Hoven, 2004). To encourage gainful employment amongst women, a diversity of measures was implemented to improve the compatibility of work and household and care duties, such as childcare facilities, adapted opening hours of shops, and laundry services (van Hoven, 2004). Despite a remaining gender pay gap, women in the GDR contributed to 40% of household income (Marx-Ferree, 1993; van Hoven, 2004). Still, both in former East and West Germany, women were mainly responsible for domestic duties on top of other labour contributions (van Hoven, 2004).

After unification in 1990, the sudden reorganisation of agricultural structures and the imposition of capitalist ideals in regions of the former GDR left many people, especially women, unemployed. Additionally, the privatisation of agriculture and the loss of the familiar social and economic relations in the cooperatives had a particularly detrimental effect on the lives of women as they were deprived of a sense of purpose and communal life and were left behind as a ‘lost generation’ that struggled to find their place in the new organisation of work and private life (Prügl, 2004,

⁴ Post-World War II period



Figure 1: Woman working with agricultural machinery in the GDR, screenshot from a documentary from 1982 (Deutsches Rundfunkarchiv, 1982).

2011a; van Hoven, 2004). However, policies to support women in the GDR also contributed to emancipatory processes. Prügl (2011a, p. 81) argues that:

the communist equality project left a legacy of women's empowerment reflected in their continued presence in white-collar positions on farms and in the higher rate of women running family farms as compared to the West.

The share of women as farm managers today is considerably higher in the federal states of the former GDR (17.2%) than in the federal states of former West Germany (10.5%) (BMEL, 2024a) and in a 2006 study only 2% of rural women identified as “housewives” in Eastern compared to 24% in Western German regions (Becker et al., 2006).

Women farmers today

In 2023, an extensive study commissioned by the German Ministry of Food and Agriculture (BMEL) on women in agricultural holdings was published, giving valuable insights into the experiences of over 7000 women working in agriculture, highlighting the prevailing inequities that pervade the lives of women farmers in Germany (Pieper et al., 2023).

The study confirms that, like in other EU member states, women are denied equal access to ownership of farms as gender-specific socialisation and traditional family models favour men as legal owners of farms both through prioritisation as farm successors as well as advantages

in access to credit and thus land (Pieper et al., 2023). Out of all participants, only 18% were designated as farm successors at the time of the study, although the number of female farm successors is rising (Pieper et al., 2023).

Especially on family farms (which make up 90% of all farms in Germany) where women enter the farm through marriage or registered partnership, the nature of their labour contribution often has significant implications for social and financial security. A third of the interviewed women do not consider having adequate social protection for retirement (Padel et al., 2022). Although the German Agricultural Pension Fund also provides for partners of farm managers regardless of their contribution to farm work, the pension received through this social security scheme is not sufficient, and women have criticised that their pension is only based on their status as wives or partners, instead of their work on the farm (Padel et al., 2022). Further, giving up non-farm wage labour for care work excludes women from the statutory pension insurance, and the topic of entitlements in case of divorce or death is sensitive and often taboo within partnerships and the family-in-law (Padel et al., 2022; Pieper et al., 2023).

Although the majority of women participate in on-farm decision-making (72%) and accounting (62%), they experience a discrepancy in their perception of responsibilities and legal position, as well as a lack of recognition of their labour contributions and a gender pay gap (Pieper et al., 2023). Despite increasing participation in farm work, women remain primarily responsible for tasks traditionally associated with female labour, such as animal husbandry, bookkeeping or social responsibilities. 50% of women also engage in direct marketing, processing and/or farm tourism as secondary enterprises (Padel et al., 2022; Pieper et al., 2023).

The diversity of farm, household, and care labour that women contribute to increasingly leads to role conflicts, exacerbated by family and generational conflicts and financial burdens. Many (expecting) mothers are conflicted between raising their children according to traditional values and their desire to maintain their role in farm labour while simultaneously feeling pressured by the image of the ‘power woman’ who manages both without asking for help (Bolten et al., 2024). Especially young women who are more involved in fieldwork and machinery experience and struggle with the double burden of reconciling farm work and childcare (Pieper et al., 2023). Further challenges are reduced mobility and the inaccessibility of many services in rural areas,

making women lose valuable time covering long distances to run errands and fulfil household and care duties (Pieper et al., 2023). Despite these challenges, 60% of the interviewed women participate in voluntary work and maintain social commitments (Pieper et al., 2023). As a consequence of high workloads, varied responsibilities, and role and family conflicts, 21% of women in the study are at risk of burnout (Pieper et al., 2023). Next to psychological burdens, the study found that both on farms and in vocational schools there is insufficient education and awareness about health and safety hazards for women on farms, such as exposure to human fertility-related substances and zoonoses, and occupational safety regulations are often not respected (Pieper et al., 2023).

Despite the complex challenges faced by women farmers in the study, many women have developed creative strategies to break with heteronormative power relations and claim their place on farms, especially in managing positions. Many young women chose agricultural studies over practical training as a professionalisation and empowerment strategy to access farms as successors. This allows for bridging knowledge gaps related to gender-specific socialisation, fostering self-confidence, building contacts and networks, and writing business plans to facilitate negotiations with parents over farm succession. An orientation toward female role models, for successors often mothers, but for new entrants also other women working in agriculture, encourages them to challenge gender stereotypes through support and setting examples of independence. Solidarity and support networks in general are a valuable resource, especially for new entrants. Other strategies are the clear separation of work and partnerships and deliberate rejection of the family farm model, as well as (out of necessity) the diversification of farm activities and orientation toward innovative and sustainable production methods and direct marketing to strengthen independence and self-determination (Pieper et al., 2023).

3.2 Gender equality in the current agricultural policy

The inclusion of gender equality as an objective for the formulation of policy measures in the German NSP is obligatory based on the regulations that form the legal basis of the CAP. In Regulation (EU) 2021/2115 (33), equality between genders is described as equality between men and women and requires the improvement of the situation of women in rural areas and farming.

This binary interpretation of gender is largely adopted in the German NSP, as equality measures relate exclusively to women.

Beyond the obligatory inclusion of gender equality in the specific objectives of the policy, the German NSP lists “equality between all genders and social groups” (*“Gleichstellung aller Geschlechter und sozialen Gruppen”*, referred to as need H.7) as a need with high priority (second highest priority level) in its needs assessment (BMEL, 2024a, p. 35). The formulation ‘all genders’ hints at a multiplicity of genders beyond a binary, albeit only ambiguously and without further elaboration.

According to the policy’s needs assessment, amongst all ten SOs equality between all genders and social groups is addressed exclusively by SO8 “Promoting employment, growth, gender equality, including the participation of women in agriculture, social inclusion and local development in rural areas, including the circular bio-economy and sustainable forestry” (*“Förderung von Beschäftigung, Wachstum, der Gleichstellung der Geschlechter, einschließlich der Beteiligung von Frauen an der Landwirtschaft, sozialer Inklusion sowie der lokalen Entwicklung in ländlichen Gebieten, einschließlich kreislauforientierter Bioökonomie und nachhaltiger Forstwirtschaft”*), although also SO7 “Increasing attraction and support of young farmers and other new entrants; facilitation of sustainable business development in rural areas” (*“Steigerung der Attraktivität für Junglandwirte und andere neue Betriebsinhaber sowie deren Unterstützung; Förderung einer nachhaltigen Unternehmensentwicklung in ländlichen Gebieten”*) refers to H.7 and the low share of young women as farm managers. In two instances, the need H.7 is referred to as a ‘cross-cutting task’ across all policy objectives⁵, a formulation that is used as well for the cross-cutting objective to foster modernisation, to which an entire chapter equivalent to the SOs

⁵ “Equality between all genders and social groups (H.7) is a high priority and serves as a cross-cutting task not only within the specific objective, but rather across all objectives of the CAP Strategic Plan. Consequently, structures and framework conditions should be designed in such a way that non-discriminatory, economic, political and social participation opportunities exist for all people in rural areas.”

“Die Gleichstellung aller Geschlechter und sozialen Gruppen (H.7) besitzt eine hohe Priorität und dient als Querschnittsaufgabe nicht nur innerhalb des spezifischen Ziels, sondern vielmehr über alle Ziele des GAP-Strategieplans hinweg. Folglich sollen Strukturen und Rahmenbedingungen so gestaltet werden, dass diskriminierungsfreie, wirtschaftliche, politische und gesellschaftliche Teilhabechancen für alle Menschen in den ländlichen Gebieten bestehen.” (BMEL 2024c, p. 345, and in nearly identical formulation on p. 470)

is dedicated. However, there are no further details as to how H.7 is treated as a cross-cutting task across all policy objectives.

Within SO8, H.7 is mentioned within three interventions as a need that is addressed (EL-0411, EL-0412, EL-0703, see also chapter 5.1.1, Table 1). All three of these interventions are listed among interventions for the development of rural areas. Out of 44 result indicators for the SOs and 37 output indicators for specific interventions (both defined at EU level), none are dedicated to the evaluation of gender equality goals. One result indicator (R.36 generational renewal) specifies the disaggregation of data by gender but is not linked to SO8 as the main objective for the promotion of gender equality.

Although the inclusion of gender equality goals in the NSPs is mandatory for member states, the extent of inclusion, development of, and elaboration on specific measures and interventions to foster gender equality can tell different stories. A closer look at how gender inequality is addressed opens up space to challenge related dominant discourses. Thus, I now turn to the theory that builds the foundation of my research in identifying and scrutinising these discourses.

4 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: WHAT'S THE PROBLEM REPRESENTED TO BE?

In this thesis, I interrogate the representation of gender inequality as a 'problem' in the current German agricultural policy as the NSP of the EU CAP by conducting a poststructural policy analysis. I apply the 'What's the problem represented to be?' (WPR) approach developed by Carol Bacchi (Bacchi, 2012a; Bacchi & Goodwin, 2016c) with a specific focus on the constitutive effects of the identified problem representations. The analysis is guided by the framework's six interrelated questions that aim at uncovering dominant discourses and taken-for-granted truths, and includes a self-problematisation exercise to challenge one's own way of thinking. I present the questions and elaborate on their application for my analysis of the policy's representation of gender inequality in chapter 4.2.

The framework has gained prominence in recent years and has been applied predominantly to analyse drug use policy (i.e., Atkinson et al., 2019; Bacchi, 2017b; Brown and Wincup, 2020; Lancaster and Ritter, 2014), as well as problem representations of gender-based discrimination (i.e., Ingrey, 2018; Rönnblom et al., 2023; Rönnblom and Keisu, 2013) and other inequalities affecting marginalised groups of society (i.e., Apelmo, 2022; Dawson et al., 2021; FitzGerald and McGarry, 2015; Powell and Murray, 2008) in different policy areas. Few examples exist for the application of the WPR approach to gender inequality in agriculture and agriculture-related policies, such as the work of Andersson et al. (2022) on agricultural policy in Rwanda, Cheong et al. (2024) on gender mainstreaming in agricultural and rural development policy in Myanmar and Nepal, Ville et al. (2023), who analyse Swedish forestry and rural development policy, and the work of Pettersson et al. (2024) on Swedish rural development policy. Further, Johansson and Holmquist (2024) analyse the EU LEADER program for rural development, yet without a gender focus.

The findings of these studies show how specific problem representations and associated underlying assumptions and rationalities determine which solutions are available to policymakers and considered to be appropriate and desirable. Especially in policies that address gender-based discrimination the studies highlight the focus of problem representations on the individual as lacking while disregarding power relations and privilege, risking the reproduction of discrimination and further marginalisation. In studies that interrogate gender in agricultural and/or rural policies, analyses specifically point out the reinforcement of gender binaries and the masculine norm (e.g., Andersson et al., 2022; Cheong et al., 2024; Ingrey, 2018) and the exploitation of gender equality goals for economic benefit (e.g., Pettersson et al., 2024; Ville et al., 2023).

4.1 Policies as productive practices

The WPR approach builds on the notion of policies as constitutive practices and aims at acquiring a deeper understanding of policies and the policy process by questioning and rethinking ‘problems’ and associated ‘solutions’ and scrutinising the underlying knowledges and taken-for-granted categories that govern dominant discourses (Bacchi, 2017a, 2021). It is rooted in a poststructural

critique⁶ that challenges assumptions about how things come to be considered ‘true’ and is influenced by Michel Foucault’s work on discourse and other related concepts (Bacchi & Goodwin, 2016a; Foucault, 1984). In applying this theoretical foundation to policies, the aim is not to carve out what the ‘problem’ ‘really’ is or to find ‘better solutions’ but to “understand policy better than policy makers by probing the unexamined assumptions and deep-seated conceptual logics within implicit problem representations” (Bacchi, 2012a, p. 22).

According to the EU’s Better Regulation agenda, to use an example from the context of my research, “Scientific evidence is another cornerstone of better regulation, vital to establishing an accurate description of the problem, a real understanding of causality and therefore intervention logic; and to evaluate impact” (European Commission, 2021, p. 3). This statement carries ontological and epistemological assumptions that a poststructural critique can help unpack. The notion of ‘evidence’ asserts truth claims, ‘accurate description’ and ‘real understanding’ are built on the assumption of fixed meanings and that something can be objectively known and correctly described. Further, the notions of ‘logic’ and ‘evaluation’ require a universal rationality and measurable materiality that provides policymakers with the ‘true’ explanation of the social phenomenon that is to be addressed by a policy. What is central here is the presumed existence of a ‘problem’.

There is a common understanding of policies as proposals that respond to a particular ‘problem’. Rose (1999, p. 58) argues “If policies [...] purport to provide answers, they do so only in relation to a set of questions. Their very status as answers is dependent upon the existence of such questions.” Considering the prevailing “problem-solving paradigm” (Bacchi, 2010, p. 1) in policymaking, policies are commonly considered *reactive* practices. However, following Bacchi, I argue that policies are, in fact, productive practices that legitimise truth claims and (re-)produce discourses in the institutional context (Bacchi, 2009).

⁶ Poststructuralism as a “style of theorizing” (Howarth, 2013b, p. 6) formed in the 1960s in France as a response to but also further development of structuralist contributions to social theory. Both theoretical traditions focus on the role and importance of underlying structures for the construction of meaning and understanding of the social world and reject essentialist notions that claim the existence of a true nature of reality by positioning the construction of meaning in relation to underlying systems. Poststructuralist approaches, however, challenge the structuralist assumption of the fixity and universality of these systems and engage with questions that arise from this critique. They interrogate the construction of categories and taken-for-granted truths, and the power relations that produce limits to what is possible to be known (Woodward et al., 2009).

Here, it is necessary to elaborate on the understanding of critical concepts that build the theoretical foundation of my research. It is important, however, to keep in mind that these concepts do not *have* any fixed or 'right' meaning, but they merely suggest how one can understand these concepts to *produce* meaning and knowledges about objects of inquiry.

4.1.1 *Problematisations and practices*

In the context of my research, a poststructuralist conceptualisation considers policies not as a reaction to the 'problem' of gender inequality in agriculture but understands policies themselves as constitutive of the object of gender inequality in agriculture as the 'problem', as well as constitutive of 'subjects', such as 'female farmers' and 'male farmers' (Bacchi, 2017a; Bacchi & Goodwin, 2016a). This does not relativise gender inequality and the discrimination against women farmers (and gender-diverse farmers for that matter) as a lived experience, but highlights that policies carry specific representations of gender inequality as a 'problem' that are not "fixed and uncontroversial starting points for policy development" (Bacchi, 2012a, p. 23). Rose (1999, p. 58) writes "in reconstructing the problematizations which accord them intelligibility as answers, these grounds become visible, their limits and presuppositions are opened for interrogation in new ways."

Foucault turned his attention to the study of such *problematisations*, that is, the examination of the *practices* that constitute specific objects of thought (such as gender inequality) as 'problems', in his later work (Lemke, 2012b; Owen, 2014). Foucault (1984, p. 389) describes the study of problematisations as:

a question of a movement of critical analysis in which one tries to see how the different solutions to a problem have been constructed; but also how these different solutions result from a specific form of problematization.

While conventional forms of knowledge, such as Western science, contribute to shaping the construction of an object of thought (i.e. gender inequality in agriculture), practices constitute a concealed layer through which problematisations emerge (Bacchi, 2012b). The significance lies in the materialisation of practices as sites of contestation, as "places" (Foucault, 2000, p. 225)

where possibilities and impossibilities are negotiated, and where the “micro-physics of power” are at play (Foucault, 1995, p. 26). What is interrogated is not what individuals do, but what practices bring into being. What is examined is not the objects of inquiry, but the relations that establish conditions of possibility that produce them as “objects for thought” (Bacchi & Goodwin, 2016a, p. 33).

Thus, as subjects and objects, such as ‘women farmers’ or ‘gender inequality’ are produced through practices, such as policies, they do not exist as natural or essential and uncontested categories but are produced as such (Bacchi & Goodwin, 2016a). The focus on processes, on *doing*, resurfaces and highlights the relevance of the relations that shape practices instead of accepting subjects and objects as fixed categories. Specifically relevant here is the understanding of policies as *gendering* and *heteronorming* (but also *racializing*, *classing*, etc.) practices (Bacchi, 2017a). The focus is shifted from the individual who is being discriminated against to the ongoing, dynamic and never complete processes of *doing* inequality, opening up the sites of contestation (relations of practices, knowledges and power) that constitute taken-for-granted categories. Bacchi (2017a) argues that the discursive practices that encompass a policy (or the absence of a policy) have lived effects by organising society to fit into these categories and thus determining the limitations of the possible.

4.1.2 *Discourse, knowledge, and power*

The centrality of practices and the focus on relationality in poststructural theory is also visible in the Foucauldian understanding of discourse and related concepts of knowledge and power. Foucault is concerned with the constitutive power of language that shapes what is accepted as truth. However, he does not understand language merely as a linguistic mode of communication, but rather as *discourse*. According to Law (2004, p. 159), discourse from a Foucauldian perspective can be understood as:

A set of relations of heterogeneous materiality, that recursively produces objects, subjects, knowledges, powers, distributions of power. Discourse is productive. At the same time it sets limits to what is possible or knowable.

Here again, specific attention is paid to the role of relations in the construction of accepted truths that enable a shift in focus from the object of inquiry to the underlying practices that make certain regimes of truth possible. Following the assumption that practices shape realities, one must reject the universality of what is known to be true and interrogate the systems that make singular rationalities self-evident (Lemke, 2012b).

The focus lies on the constitutive power of discourse, not as something that is *said*, but something that makes possible what *can* be said. It forms at the intersection of *power* and *knowledge*, where knowledge is not 'truth' but 'accepted truth' (Bacchi & Goodwin, 2016a; Foucault, 1978). Power, according to Foucault, is relational and performative (Bacchi & Goodwin, 2016a; Lemke, 2012a). It is not something to be possessed, but "the name that one attributes to a complex strategical situation" (Foucault, 1978, p. 93). These productive (as opposed to reactive) power relations inherently encompass "ceaseless struggles and confrontations" (Foucault, 1978, p. 92). With this understanding of power, Foucault distances his conceptualisation from the prevalent definition of power associated with repression and domination, power as inherently 'bad'. Indeed, Foucault (1995, p. 194) challenges this negative perception of power by highlighting how power relations are constitutive of reality:

We must cease once and for all to describe the effects of power in negative terms: it 'excludes', it 'represses', it 'censors', it 'abstracts', it 'masks', it 'conceals.' In fact, power produces; it produces reality; it produces domains of objects and rituals of truth.

This does not negate the experience of oppression, but it locates it as solidified strategies of power that produce a rigid system of control with minimal spaces for contestation (Howarth, 2013a; Lemke, 2012a). These spaces of resistance, however, always co-exist with power relations. If power was equated with domination, and no possibilities for freedom, change and fluidity existed, power as domination would be obsolete. Thus, as power relations produce reality, resistance does not lie outside these relations but is produced and negotiated within (Bacchi & Goodwin, 2016a). In recognising this process of becoming, truth claims enter "the play of the true and the false" (Foucault, 1988, p. 257) and unsettle the stability of what is considered to be 'true' by highlighting the volatility of power relations.

In understanding policies, such as the German NSP, as constitutive practices that do not merely react to a pre-determined issue, such as gender inequality in agriculture, but are conducive to its production as a 'problem', the instability of such power relations and related practices become visible. Implicit problematisations and processes of subjectification that appear as taken-for-granted truths are challenged, opening up spaces of resistance and enabling to think differently about the practices and power relations that shape discourses on gender (in)equality in agriculture, and, consequently, shape how it is perceived as 'reality'.

4.2 Operationalisation

I now elaborate in more detail on my implementation of the WPR framework for a poststructural policy analysis. The WPR is approached through six questions and a self-problematisation step (Bacchi & Goodwin, 2016b, p. 20), although Bacchi does not envisage the WPR approach as a tick-box exercise, but rather as a set of interrelated questions that serve as “ways of seeing” (Bacchi, 2024):

1. What's the problem (e.g., of “gender inequality”, “drug use/abuse”, “economic development”, “global warming”, “childhood obesity”, “irregular migration”, etc.) represented to be in a specific policy or policies?
2. What deep-seated presuppositions or assumptions underlie this representation of the “problem” (problem representation)?
3. How has this representation of the “problem” come about?
4. What is left unproblematic in this problem representation? Where are the silences? Can the “problem” be conceptualized differently?
5. What effects (discursive, subjectification, lived) are produced by this representation of the “problem”?
6. How and where has this representation of the “problem” been produced, disseminated and defended? How has it been and/or how can it be disrupted and replaced?
7. Apply this list of questions to your own problem representations.

With **Question 1** I aim to identify how gender inequality is problematised in the policy text by highlighting the specific problem statements and proposed solutions to gender inequality that the policy puts forward as a response to a particular problem representation (“reading backwards”). Thus, I will approach this question by identifying problem statements as well as suggested solutions relating to gender inequality in the policy text. This forms the analytical base for the remaining questions that engage more closely with the context and different aspects of the identified implicit problem representations.

Question 2 examines the ontological and epistemological assumptions that are intertwined with the previously identified problem representations of gender inequality. The aim is to bring to light unintentional beliefs that may not be in coherence with the policy objectives laid out intentionally, such as gender equality.

Question 3 addresses the historical processes and practices that make possible and legitimise the identified problem representations, offering spaces for reflection to challenge them as taken-for-granted truths. A detailed genealogical analysis is a considerably extensive task that goes beyond the scope of this thesis. However, it is of great importance to discuss implicit problem representations in the context of their historical emergence to challenge the perception of, in this case, representations of gender inequality in agriculture as self-evident. Thus, I adopt a genealogical sensibility (Cort & Thomsen, 2024; Tamboukou & Ball, 2003) by approaching the subjectification effects (Q5) of identified problem representations (as the focus of my research) in relation to their historical context.

Question 4 scrutinises the constraints of implicit problem representations by reflecting on potential invisibilised perspectives. Reaching beyond perceived limitations encourages to think differently about gender inequality as a ‘problem’ and makes different realities possible. Closely related are Question 3, which challenges the status of implicit problem representations as self-evident and Question 6, which highlights the spaces where these processes of legitimisation take place.

Question 5 specifically explores the constitutive effects of the identified problem representations through three analytical perspectives: *Discursive* effects, closely linked to Question 4, shape the limits of what is considered possible and legitimate to think or say about gender inequality.

Subjectification effects create limits to the shapes and meanings of related categories, such as 'women' as specific subjects that are produced by particular representations. *Lived* effects address the consequences of implicit problem representations as they materialise in the everyday lives of subjects and produce tangible possibilities and constraints. In this thesis, I will focus on subjectification effects, and thus on the making and unmaking of women farmers as subjects.

Question 6, like Question 3, probes the processes and practices that legitimise specific problem representations. It specifically highlights the spaces of contestation where problem representations are negotiated, opening up spaces for resistance to explore how gender inequality can be thought about differently and challenge dominant representations.

Step 7 serves as an 'exercise' (or rather an approach or mode of thinking) to ensure that self-problematisation is a crucial part of the research process. I, as a researcher, do not stand detached or separated from my research, with a distanced and objective view of the data, knowledge practices, and discourses. I do not stand outside of those limits that determine what is perceived as 'real' and 'true' with the authority to preside over what is possible to be 'real' and 'true'. I need to consider the constitutive consequences of my own subjectivity for the interpretative work and knowledges that I produce in this thesis. There is no straightforward, outlined approach to this, but it is more of a critical ethic towards my own assumptions and creation of meaning maintained throughout the entire process of this thesis that gives space to the possibilities of my own shortcomings. I approach this step of self-problematisation in chapter 5.3.

While problem statements and proposed solutions (Q1) are more 'easily' identified in the policy text, engaging with the remaining questions requires particular analytical scrutiny. Here especially, my own biases and understanding of gender inequality as a problem, of the surrounding discourses, and political and cultural contexts, influence the research process and the interpretations and conclusions that I produce. By reflecting on these biases and engaging thoroughly with literature on the context of gender in agriculture and policy, I aim to reduce this bias.

5 METHODOLOGY

In this chapter, I present the research design and methods used to approach my research and answer my research questions. First, I will introduce the case study and policy text that I analyse and elaborate on how I use the policy for data collection. In the second part of this chapter, I will introduce my approach to the analysis.

5.1 Case study & data collection

As previously established, this research examines the representation of gender inequality as a ‘problem’ in the case of German agricultural policy, i.e. the German NSP as the translation of EU agricultural policy to the German context. The choice of a case study is rooted in the premises of the theoretical foundation of this research that aims to interrogate highly context-dependent processes and practices that are embedded in complex relations of power and knowledge (see chapters 4.1.1 and 4.1.2). This requires an in-depth understanding that can only be attained through the insights that a case study can offer. A focus on context-dependent knowledges further challenges a positivist paradigm where the objective of scientific research is to produce generalised rules and universal theories to approximate an objective truth through the discovery of context-independent knowledge. In his paper on the common misconceptions of modern science about case study research, Flyvbjerg (2006, p. 224) argues that:

Predictive theories and universals cannot be found in the study of human affairs. Concrete, context-dependent knowledge is, therefore, more valuable than the vain search for predictive theories and universals.

Here, Flyvbjerg is not invalidating scientific methods that use large samples, but he criticises the dismissal of case study research as merely exploratory and of little value per se⁷. He argues in

⁷ See for example Gorard (2013, pp. 17–18) “With so few of the elements of research design present here, there is little that such research [case studies] can do beyond exploratory initial descriptive preparation for subsequent studies”.

favour of the importance of case knowledge and experience for human learning and for moving to an understanding beyond rules and rationalities (Flyvbjerg, 2006).

This is where I pick up with my choice of a case study, as I consider an analysis of several NSPs of EU member states to arrive at more generalised conclusions to be accompanied by a loss of complexity in the mess of different socio-political and historical contexts that are relevant to addressing the research questions. Since the aim of my thesis is not to produce such generalised knowledge, but to challenge the taken-for-granted status of implicit problematisations of gender inequality in agricultural policy, I chose to focus on a case study to be able to interrogate specific underlying relations and discursive practices.

German agricultural policy presents a relevant case not only since the representation of German agricultural interests played an influential role in the development and formulation of the CAP after World War II (Feindt, 2018; Hendriks, 1988; Pfeffer, 1989). But also because today, with 11.2% of the total CAP budget, Germany is among the member states receiving most subsidies (after France with 17.1% and Spain with 12.5%, European Parliament, 2023) and remains the biggest net contributor to the EU budget (Berthold et al., 2024) and thus a key player in EU policy in general, as well as the CAP. Further, political developments in Germany at the time of the NSP formulation provided momentum for gender equality concerns in agricultural policy: In 2019, an extensive study on the situation of women on farms in Germany was funded and approved by the BMEL (Pieper et al., 2023), and when Cem Özdemir (Green Party, Bündnis 90/Die Grünen) took office as agricultural minister in 2021, the finalisation of the NSP was overseen by the ministry under the leadership of a party with a feminist agenda (Bündnis 90/Die Grünen, 2021).

5.1.1 The German National Strategic Plan

The policy that I examine is the German NSP 2023-2027 (BMEL, 2024c), the last amendment to which was approved by the European Commission in October 2024 (version 5.1). As the amendment took place during the time of data collection for this research, the policy document analysed (version 4.0) does not include the latest amendments. These modifications, however, do not affect the content of the selected passages to a relevant extent, but page numbers may not match those of the most recent version of the policy. The changes implemented in the

analysed sections mostly relate to modifications of formatting, and funds for intervention EL-0411 (diversification on farms) were reduced, while funds for intervention EL-0703 (LEADER⁸) were increased.

The policy was developed by the BMEL under consultation of other governmental institutions both on the national and federal state levels, civil society organisations, committees of experts and the general public in a process that started in 2019 (BMEL, 2024b). The NSP reflects Germany's vision for the development and design of the German agri-food system and rural areas by providing the grounds and conditions for the annual allocation of about EUR 6.2 billion of EU funds in the period 2023-2027 (BMEL, 2024d).

Given the length of the document and the time restrictions of my thesis, I have identified specific parts of the policy to analyse. These include all SOs and interventions that respond to the identified need H.7 “Equality between all genders and social groups” (*“Gleichstellung aller Geschlechter und sozialen Gruppen”*), as well as other parts that specifically mention women and/or gender, and other relevant parts.

SOs responding to or mentioning need H.7 are SO7 “Increasing attraction and support of young farmers and other new entrants; facilitation of sustainable business development in rural areas” (*“Steigerung der Attraktivität für Junglandwirte und andere neue Betriebsinhaber sowie deren Unterstützung; Förderung einer nachhaltigen Unternehmensentwicklung in ländlichen Gebieten”*) and SO8 “Promoting employment, growth, gender equality, including the participation of women in agriculture, social inclusion and local development in rural areas, including the circular bio-economy and sustainable forestry” (*“Förderung von Beschäftigung, Wachstum, der Gleichstellung der Geschlechter, einschließlich der Beteiligung von Frauen an der Landwirtschaft, sozialer Inklusion sowie der lokalen Entwicklung in ländlichen Gebieten, einschließlich kreislauforientierter Bioökonomie und nachhaltiger Forstwirtschaft”*).

Interventions responding to need H.7 are EL-0411 “Investments in the creation and development of non-agricultural activities on farms (promotion of diversification on farms)” (*„Investitionen in die Schaffung und Entwicklung nicht-landwirtschaftlicher Tätigkeiten in landwirtschaftlichen*

⁸ From French *Liaison entre actions de développement de l'économie rurale* (Links between actions for the development of the rural economy), a EU rural development program funded under the second pillar (EAFRD) of the CAP.

Betrieben (Förderung der Diversifizierung landwirtschaftlicher Betriebe (FID))“), EL-0412 “Promotion of investments in the development of non-agricultural businesses in rural areas” (*“Förderung von Investitionen in die Entwicklung nichtlandwirtschaftlicher Unternehmen in ländlichen Gebieten“*), and EL-0703 “LEADER“.

Other parts specifically mentioning women and/or gender are the intervention EL-0802 “Skills development, demonstration activities and knowledge sharing” (*“Qualifizierung, Demonstrationstätigkeiten und Wissensaustausch“*) and an overview of the strategy for generational renewal (*“Übersicht über die Strategie eines Generationswechsels“*), which also relates to SO7.

Finally, I consider the assessment of needs and intervention strategy (*“Bewertung der Bedarfe und der Interventionsstrategie“*) relevant for analysis, since it both elaborates on need H.7, as well as offers background information and target states for all identified needs. Thus, this part of the policy can provide interesting insights into discourses that may be identified as related to gender in the context of a range of topics that represent a cross-section of ‘problems’ addressed in the policy. Table 1 gives an overview of the selected policy sections, which in total amount to 136 pages to be analysed.

Table 1: Overview of analysed policy chapters in the German National Strategic Plan for the Common Agricultural Policy 2023-2027 (version 4.0). H.7 refers to “equality between all genders and social groups” (*“Gleichstellung aller Geschlechter und sozialen Gruppen“*) as part of the needs assessment, which is given a high priority.

Title	Type	Content	Relevance	Pages
SO7 Increasing attraction and support of young farmers and other new entrants; facilitation of sustainable business development in rural areas	Specific objective	SWOT-analysis, assessment of needs, intervention logic, result indicators, justification of the financial allocation	Responding to need H.7	309–316
SO8 Promoting employment, growth, gender equality, including the participation of women in agriculture, social inclusion and local development in rural areas, including the circular bio-economy and sustainable forestry	Specific objective		Responding to need H.7	336–359

Title	Type	Content	Relevance	Pages
EL-0411 Investments in the creation and development of non-agricultural activities on farms (promoting diversification on farms)	Intervention (INVEST)	Related SOs, cross-cutting objective, need(s) addressed by the intervention, result indicators, specific design, requirements and eligibility conditions, financial and other specifications	Responding to need H.7	1742–1757
EL-0412 Promoting investments in the development of non-agricultural businesses in rural areas	Intervention (INVEST)		Responding to need H.7	1758–1767
EL-0703 LEADER	Intervention (COOP)		Responding to need H.7	1836–1854
EL-0802 Skills development, demonstration activities and knowledge sharing	Intervention (KNOW)		Specifically mentioning women	1875–1899
Assessments of needs and intervention strategy	Other	Overview and prioritisation of needs, respective needs background and target state	Specifically mentioning women/gender	33–81
Overview of a strategy for generational renewal	Other	Needs and interventions related to generational renewal	Related to SO7, specifically mentioning gender	470f

5.2 Analysis

The selected parts of the policy document are analysed using an approach to coding that relies on both deductive and inductive coding (Figure 2), accompanied by the continuous use of memo writing to document my reflection process. As the WPR Q2-6 refer to the problem representations identified through Q1, my analysis sets off with a first round of provisional (deductive) coding. These *a priori* codes are derived from the first WPR question that aims to identify the representation(s) of gender inequality as a ‘problem’ within the German NSP through problem statements of gender inequality and proposed solutions as answers to the respective

‘problems’ (“reading backwards”). Thus, in a first round of coding, I identify text passages that state a ‘problem’ or ‘problems’ (code ‘Problem statement’) regarding gender inequality or describe a solution (code ‘Proposed solution’) that is designed to address a ‘problem’ related to gender inequality (Table 2, see Appendix).

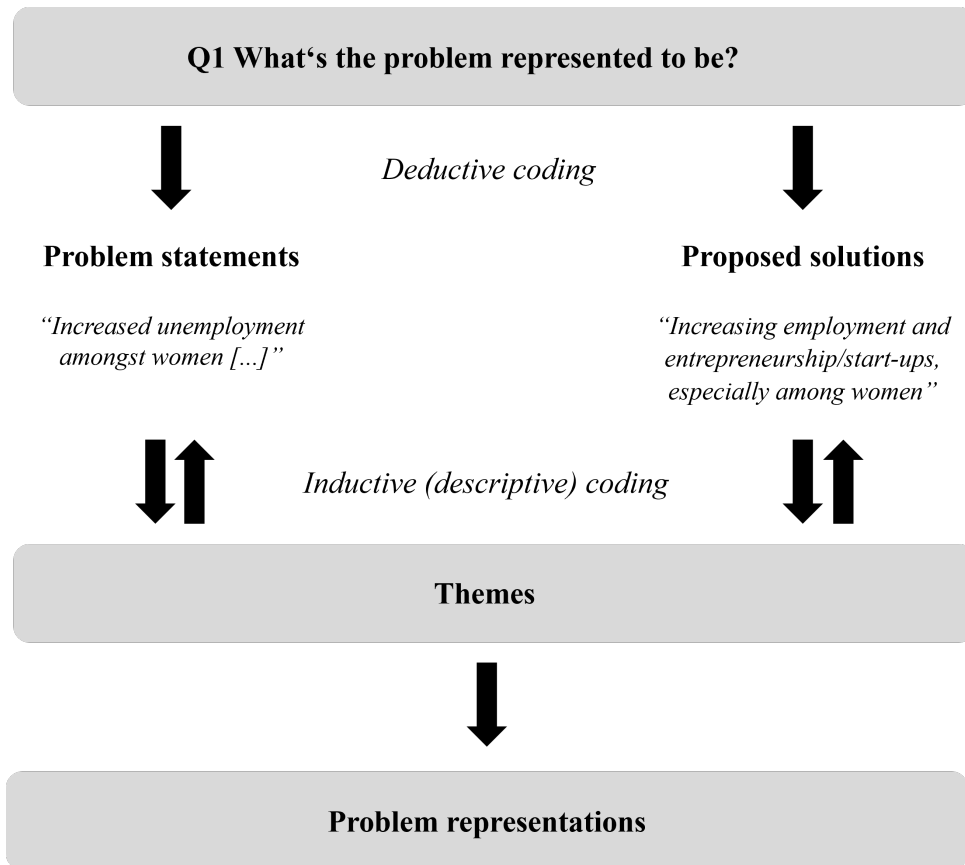


Figure 2: Overview of the coding approach to WPR Question 1 “What’s the problem represented to be?”. In a first step the framework serves as the basis for deductive codes to identify problem statements of and proposed solutions to gender inequality in the policy text. The identified text passages are then undergoing several rounds of descriptive coding in an inductive process and are organised into central themes to establish the different ways in which gender inequality is represented as a problem in the policy.

After the identification of problem statements and proposed solutions, the respective text passages are coded in an iterative and open-ended process of descriptive (inductive) coding to identify predominant topics in the problematisation of gender inequality in the policy text. In the first rounds of inductive coding, I stay close to the text to establish topics and refine the code-set to prevent oversimplification. Only in a later step in a second cycle of coding, I reorganise the topics into broader themes as final codes and subcodes (Table 2, see Appendix).

To improve transparency and trustworthiness, a session was held for peer reviewers to code a segment of the policy text (in the original language) to maintain a critical perspective on my interpretive work and reflect on other potential ways of reading the text for the codes (Schwartz-Shea, 2014). Two native German speakers were given a text passage (NSP pp. 344-345) from the overview of SO8 (as the main SO addressing gender equality goals) that elaborates on the measures and interventions that contribute to the SO. The text passage was chosen as gender equality and/or women were frequently mentioned and the main approaches to gender equality goals were summarised in this text passage. The peer-coding was only carried out for Q1, i.e. for the deductive coding of problem statements and proposed solutions, but not for inductive coding. The definitions for both deductive codes (Table 2, see Appendix) were provided, without further explanations to avoid bias. The coding was largely consistent with my own coding but attached comments with the peer-coders reflections on the text provided food-for-thought for subsequent analyses.

I acknowledge that the WPR questions, as mentioned before, are interconnected and aim at highlighting the complexity of discursive practices. Following the approach as a ‘tick-box exercise’ in a rigid manner risks oversimplifying the intricacy of problem representations, how they come about and how they shape perceived realities and possibilities within (Bacchi, 2024). Thus, just as for Q1, my engagement with Q2-6 follows an iterative process where I pay close attention to the links and entanglements between the different analytical lenses of each question. Further, since the examination of these questions guides the analysis of the identified problem representation, and thus blurs the distinction between results and discussion, I both maintain close proximity to the text by referencing specific text passages where applicable (specifically for Q1) while referring to and discussing the questions in the context of relevant literature (specifically for Q3-6).

For consistency and transparency, I maintain a codebook to document both deductive and inductive codes and provide definitions, as well as examples, respectively (Table 2, see Appendix).

5.3 Positionality and self-problematism

Before moving on to the next chapters, I want to address the seventh step of the WPR framework to acknowledge my research as a performance of power relations, yet without relativising and depoliticising my work. The aim here is not to highlight my individual reflective efforts and abilities, but to emphasise that both I, as a young researcher, Western-educated student, woman, white person, and German citizen, as well as my research, are situated within the discursive landscape that I interrogate, and that this is not without consequences for the knowledges I produce. This thesis is not an attempt at making truth claims, but it is also not an attempt at making no claims at all.

The choice of topic, research questions, theory, and methodology are informed by my review of literature, perception of relevance and my knowledge and education on how to do research, including the ontological and epistemological assumptions of Western science and my attempts at challenging these. The findings and discussion are my interpretation of the data, and neither the categories that I adopt nor the categorisations that I make are fixed and self-evident. For example, although I attempt to present gender as a non-binary concept, the absence of gender-diverse people in the German NSP and other related EU documents that I refer to risks reproducing the gender binary as my work ends up highlighting constitutive effects of problem representations specifically on women farmers. This does not make my findings less relevant but shows that there are productive tensions and contestations within my research. With this in mind, I now turn to presenting and discussing the results of my analysis.

6 RESULTS & DISCUSSION

The WPR framework itself calls for an inquiry into and discussion of the problem representations that I identified in the first step by coding for problem statements and proposed solutions (Q1). While this forms the basis for answering the first sub-research question that interrogates the representation of gender inequality as a ‘problem’ in the NSP, the remaining WPR questions provide guidance for an integrated analysis of the identified problem representations. Especially

Q5 helps answering the second sub-research question that focuses specifically on subjectification effects and builds on the findings of Q1. Thus, a clear distinction between results and discussion as separate chapters is neither applicable nor does it facilitate answering the research questions using the WPR framework.

Therefore, I first elaborate on how gender inequality is represented as a ‘problem’ in the German NSP (Q1) and the interrelated themes around which I organised these problematisations (chapter 6.1). Based on these findings, I then interrogate the logic and reasoning of the policy’s gender equality discourse to identify the central problem representation (chapter 6.2), followed by an examination of the underlying ontological and epistemological assumptions (Q2, chapter 6.2.1). Instead of continuing with a linear engagement with Q3-Q6 and individual subchapters dedicated to each, I organise the remainder of my discussion around the produced effects (Q5) with a specific focus on the main subjectification effects and the (historical) conditions and (policy) practices that legitimise dominant discourses (Q3 and Q6). Throughout the discussion, I highlight spaces of contestation by challenging the taken-for-granted status of these discourses (Q4).

6.1 The ‘problem(s)’ of gender inequality

The analysis of policy sections addressing gender (in)equality and/or the status of women in agriculture and rural areas in the German NSP provides more in-depth insights into the respective discourses dominating in the policy. The identification of problem statements and proposed solutions (Q1) highlights the contexts in which gender equality is discussed as a ‘problem’ and the line of arguments that justify associated interventions and measures. Thus, I identify problem representations based on statements about the perceived ‘problem’, as well as suggested solutions in the policy text. For instance, “Increased unemployment amongst women [. . .]” (“*Erhöhte Arbeitslosigkeit von Frauen [. . .]*”, BMEL, 2024c, p.339) as a ‘problem’ statement, and “Increasing employment and entrepreneurship/start-ups, especially among women” (“*Steigerung der Erwerbstätigkeit und des Unternehmertums/Existenzgründungen/Start ups insbesondere von Frauen*”, BMEL, 2024c, p.62) as a proposed solution represent insufficient employment of women as the ‘problem’. Amongst the policy sections analysed, approximately a third of all problem statements and proposed solutions related to gender inequality are found in the needs assessment,

and about half in SO8, respectively. Based on the deductive coding for problem statements and proposed solutions, and inductive coding for contexts in which gender (in)equality is addressed (Figure 2), I organised the data into five main themes and six sub-themes, the interrelation of which suggests an economic and growth-oriented reasoning to the stated importance of reaching gender equality goals. Before further discussion of the overall discourse, I present and elaborate on the identified themes "politics and emancipation", "education and training", "rural economy" (including three sub-themes), "vibrant rural areas" (including three sub-themes), and "work-life balance".

6.1.1 *Politics and emancipation*

As a first theme I am introducing 'politics and emancipation', as it addresses problem representations that operate at a macro-level and are not exclusively concerned with the context of agriculture and rural areas. It refers to problem statements and proposed solutions that relate to equal economic, social and political rights, addressing structural discrimination at a societal level (e.g. equality and equity, participation, recognition, stereotypes), as well as equality governance (e.g. gender mainstreaming, parity, equity frameworks).

Out of all themes, it is the most frequent context in which gender (in)equality is discussed in the policy text. A quarter of all identified problem statements and proposed solutions relates to 'politics and emancipation', mainly expressed as suggested or implemented solutions in the needs assessment and in SO8. Almost none of the problem statements and proposed solutions address women in agriculture or specifically agriculture-related inequalities but refer to women in general or women in rural areas. Only one proposed solution addresses the participation of women in, amongst others, agricultural committees to contribute to the representation of their own and their families' interests:

Greater participation of women in local political bodies, self-governing, self-organising, advisory and all other participatory bodies in rural areas and agriculture contributes to more successful decisions in the interests of women and their families.

Eine stärkere Beteiligung von Frauen in den kommunalpolitischen Gremien, den Selbstverwaltungs-, Selbstorganisations-, Beratungs- und allen anderen Mitwirkungsgremien der ländlichen

Räume und der Landwirtschaft trägt zu erfolgreicheren Entscheidungen im Interesse von Frauen und ihren Familien bei. (BMEL, 2024c, p. 71)

Most statements, however, remain vague and especially proposed solutions are often expressed as intangible goals, such as “Disparities and gender stereotypes [. . .] need to be broken down” (*“Disparitäten und Geschlechterstereotypen [. . .] gilt es aufzubrechen”*, BMEL, 2024c, p.71) or “Efforts are made to equalise disadvantages” (*“Auf den Ausgleich von Benachteiligungen wird hingewirkt”*, BMEL, 2024c, p.71). Further, the policy refers to the “gender-equitable organisation of access to non-agricultural business start-ups” (*“geschlechtergerechte Ausgestaltung des Zugangs zu nicht-landwirtschaftlichen Existenzgründungen”*, BMEL, 2024c, p.73), which is addressed extensively while gender inequalities in the access to farms are overlooked.

In general, two solutions are proposed that are elaborated on and thus tangible: A participatory and transparent approach to ensure women’s representation in Local Action Groups and the formulation of strategies within LEADER, and the promotion of gender mainstreaming, specifically for the allocation of second pillar subsidies through a “gender-sensitive implementation of EAFRD funding” (*“einer gendersensiblen Umsetzung der ELER-Förderung”*) and “strengthening the gender competence of the bodies involved” (*“Stärkung der Genderkompetenz der an der Umsetzung der ELER-Förderung beteiligten Stellen”*), as well as “the visible anchoring of the topic in rural development policies beyond the EAFRD” (*“sichtbare Verankerung des Themas in den Politiken zur Entwicklung ländlicher Räume über den ELER hinaus”*, BMEL, 2024c, p.348).

The foundation on rights-based arguments and the prevalence of this theme in the policy shows the acknowledgment of structural causes of gender inequality and the need to address these. However, the phrasing remains vague and generalised, and the high number of references to this theme is partly due to repetitions. **The main problem representation that is frequently addressed both as problem statement and proposed solution within this theme is the lack of opportunities for women for economic, political and social participation free from discrimination.**

6.1.2 Education and training

Statements referring to gender equality and/or women specifically that relate to the improvement, acquisition or lack of knowledge or skills are organised around the theme of ‘education and training’. No problem statements are made in this context, making it the only theme that is addressed exclusively in the form of proposed solutions. The need Q.3 “qualification and improvement of entrepreneurial and ecological competencies” (“*Qualifizierung und Verbesserung unternehmerischer und ökologischer Kompetenzen*”, BMEL, 2024c, p.78), as identified in the needs assessment, states the necessity for educative measures on digitalisation for people working in agriculture and forestry, as well as “strengthening the willingness and opportunities for further training and lifelong learning through decentralised offers, especially for women” (“*Stärkung der Bereitschaft und Möglichkeiten zur Weiterbildung und lebenslangem Lernen durch dezentrale Angebote, insbesondere für Frauen*”, BMEL, 2024c, p.78).

The policy puts forward seven solutions referring to ‘education and training’ as specific measures such as digitalisation training for women in voluntary work, coaching and qualification measures to improve women’s professional, entrepreneurial and personal competencies, and the promotion of consultancy for agricultural families (as contributing to need H.7). The majority of these measures, however, are exclusively implemented in the federal state of Baden-Württemberg, which includes the annual allocation of 20.000€ for “coaching measures for women in rural areas” (“*Coachingsmaßnahmen für Frauen im Ländlichen Raum*”, BMEL, 2024c, p.1891), and 14.000€ for “qualification measures for women in rural areas” (“*Qualifizierungsmaßnahmen für Frauen im Ländlichen Raum*”, BMEL, 2024c, p.1892), respectively. **The main problem representation in the context of ‘education and training’ is women’s lack of knowledge and skills.**

6.1.3 Rural economy

Problem statements and proposed solutions directly relating to economic matters in rural areas are referred to by this theme and are divided into the sub-themes ‘labour market participation’, ‘entrepreneurship’, and ‘farming’.

Statements addressing women's (lack of) participation in productive labour (employment opportunities, access to employment) are summarised as **'labour market participation'**. The theme is primarily discussed in the needs assessment and SO8 and is strongly linked to other (sub-)themes, such as 'work-life balance', 'demographics', and 'entrepreneurship'. In the policy, women's unemployment, presented as a result of insufficient job opportunities and limited access to employment, is stated as the main 'problem', but struggles with work-life balance and missing social infrastructure are expressed as underlying causes. The main solutions proposed to increase employment amongst women are the creation of jobs close to home, living wages, and appropriate working conditions. Specifically, investments in the development of non-agricultural businesses are frequently addressed.

The theme **'entrepreneurship'** summarises problem statements and suggested solutions that refer to the creation of new businesses in rural areas. Between the three sub-themes of 'rural economy', it is addressed most frequently, mainly as proposed solutions. Entry barriers and outmigration from rural areas are stated as the 'problems' that hinder women's entrepreneurship in rural areas. Most proposed solutions are vague and intangible goals, such as accounting for the "gender-equitable organisation of the access to non-agricultural business start-ups" ("*geschlechtergerechte Ausgestaltung des Zugangs zu nicht-landwirtschaftlichen Existenzgründungen*", BMEL, 2024c, p.73), increasing business competitiveness, or the general facilitation of entrepreneurship. More tangible solutions that are proposed in the policy are the beforementioned education measures to improve women's entrepreneurial competencies promoted with the intervention EL-0802, and qualification measures for the development of businesses in rural areas. It should be noted that in the majority of cases the promotion of women's entrepreneurship refers specifically to non-agricultural businesses, which is further highlighted by two interventions (EL-0411 and EL-0412) that foster the development of non-agricultural businesses as a response to need H.7.

Statements about gender equality and/or women that relate to the agricultural context and agricultural activities, grouped under the theme **'farming'**, are addressed the least amongst all themes. In all policy sections analysed, gender (in)equality in agriculture or women farmers are directly addressed five times. One problem statement in SO7 refers to the low share of young women as farm managers as a weakness in the SWOT analysis. Proposed solutions related to 'farming' are increasing the participation of women in, amongst others, agricultural committees,

and the promotion of advisory services on social matters for farming families (as contributing to need H.7). Further, the strategy for generational renewal states that all genders benefit equally and free from discrimination from support for the (family and non-family) takeover of farms, support for the access to land and capital, adequate income for young farmers, and the diversification of farms and income streams.

The theme ‘rural economy’ plays a central role in the policy’s discussion of gender equality. The importance of women’s employment and business opportunities is highlighted, but a discussion of women’s participation in agricultural enterprises is strongly underrepresented. **Therefore, the main problem representation in relation to ‘rural economy’ is women’s insufficient access to non-agricultural employment and business opportunities.**

6.1.4 *Vibrant rural areas*

This main theme focuses on aspects of the future outlook in rural areas as a response to stated problems or as an expected consequence of proposed solutions. It is divided into the sub-themes ‘rural development’, ‘social infrastructure’, and ‘demographics’.

Discussions in the policy text relating to the prosperity and structural and economic development potential of rural areas are organised around the sub-theme ‘**rural development**’. The theme is addressed predominantly as proposed solutions. Problem statements are strongly related to other (sub-)themes, such as ‘rural economy’, ‘social infrastructure’, and ‘demographics’ as they are associated with the structural weakness and lack of opportunities that cause outmigration from rural areas and the impending shortage of skilled labour:

Vulnerable groups such as [...] women [...], who often have little influence apart from moving away due to geographical circumstances, are offered real options locally. In this way, structures are created that offer protection against disadvantage and thus give rural areas strong and sustainable opportunities for development

Vulnerablen Gruppen wie u.a. [...], Frauen [...], die häufig aufgrund geographischer Gegebenheiten kaum Einflussmöglichkeiten bis auf den Wegzug haben, werden reale Optionen vor Ort geboten. Auf diese Weise werden Strukturen geschaffen, die Schutz vor

Benachteiligung bieten und damit dem ländlichen Raum zukunftsfähige und starke Entwicklungschancen einräumen. (BMEL, 2024c, p. 353)

The main solutions proposed are the strengthening of rural economic structures through investments in small- and medium-sized businesses, specifically mentioning the role and potential of the skilled labour of women, the economic development of regional supply chains, and the utilisation of the diverse potentials and resources of rural areas as location factor. These solutions are meant to contribute to “future-proof and strong development opportunities” (“*zukunftsfähige und starke Entwicklungschancen*”, BMEL, 2024c, p.353) by maintaining the innovative and economic power of rural areas, strengthening rural economic structures and economic growth, and securing social prosperity.

The theme of ‘**social infrastructure**’ is closely linked with discussions around ‘rural development’, as associated problem statements and proposed solutions address issues regarding rural support infrastructures, i.e. the access to and provision of services of general interest or the performance of voluntary activities. A lack of social infrastructures, especially for families, as well as a pronounced traditional understanding of role divisions in care work, are stated as ‘problems’ related to this theme in relation to gender (in)equality and/or women:

This necessity [for equality between all genders and social groups] arises from the lack of social infrastructure (e.g. childcare facilities) in many rural areas and a still very pronounced traditional understanding of household management and caring for children and people in need of care.

Die Notwendigkeit [für die Gleichstellung aller Geschlechter und sozialen Gruppen] ergibt sich aus mangelnden sozialen Infrastrukturen (z. B. Kinderbetreuungseinrichtungen) in dortigen vielen ländlichen Gebieten und einem noch stark ausgeprägten traditionellen Rollenverständnis bei der Haushaltsführung sowie Betreuung der Kinder- und pflegebedürftiger Personen. (BMEL, 2024c, p. 345)

Few directly related solutions are proposed for the development and expansion of social infrastructure in rural areas, such as the creation of medical, educational, and care-, family-, and youth-related support structures for improving work-life balance and increasing employment, especially of women. Other solutions target the promotion of voluntary work.

The discussion of stated problems in relation to the (changes in) composition of the rural population is summarised under the theme ‘**demographics**’. The creation of jobs close to home, living wages, and appropriate working conditions as “real options” (“*reale Optionen*”, BMEL, 2024c, p.353) are proposed as solutions for the migration, especially of women and families, from rural areas, an impending shortage of skilled labour, increased unemployment, and low wage levels.

The three sub-themes related to ‘vibrant rural areas’ are largely discussed as mediating factors of themes that are more strongly highlighted (such as ‘labour market participation’ and ‘entrepreneurship’). **Nevertheless, within this theme, the structural weakness of rural areas (as a cause for women’s insufficient employment and business opportunities, as well as migration from rural areas) is presented as the main problem representation.**

6.1.5 *Work-life balance*

The compatibility of productive and reproductive labour is mainly problematised in connection with statements that relate to the themes ‘politics and emancipation’ and ‘social infrastructure’. The problems stated are the multiple burdens caused by family, career, and voluntary work on women, who take primary responsibility for care-work without sufficient support structures and suitable non-agricultural job opportunities. Solutions suggested in the needs assessment are the creation of support structures as mentioned previously in elaborations on the theme ‘social infrastructure’, and ensuring mobility and digital connectivity. Developed policy interventions and measures as solutions to the ‘problem’ of women’s struggles with work-life balance are primarily related to the support of economic independence through the promotion of investments in the development of non-agricultural businesses (which is directed specifically at women in Baden-Württemberg) to provide job- and income-opportunities close to home and support economic independence:

The aim of this support for projects specifically for women in rural areas [EL-0412] is therefore to open up income and employment prospects close to home, for example by supporting self-employment, and also to improve the compatibility of family and career.

Ziel dieser Förderung von Vorhaben speziell für Frauen im ländlichen Raum [EL-0412] ist es daher, zum einen wohnortnahe Einkommens- und Beschäftigungsperspektiven zu erschließen u. a. durch die Unterstützung der Selbstständigkeit, und zum anderen die Vereinbarkeit von Familie und Beruf zu verbessern. (BMEL, 2024c, p. 345)

This is further fostered by educational measures to improve professional, entrepreneurial, and personal competencies especially of female entrepreneurs.

Similarly to the previous theme, ‘work-life balance’ is primarily presented as an underlying determinant of problem representations related to more centrally discussed themes associated with women’s economic participation. **The main problem representation is women’s insufficient accessibility to services of general interest and employment close to home.**

6.2 The ‘problem’ of economic participation

In the previous chapter I elaborated on the themes that I established to organise the problem statements and proposed solutions that I identified in the application of the first WPR question to the German NSP. In critically scrutinising the implicit representations of gender inequality in agriculture as a ‘problem’ and their interrelations, I find nested representations (Bacchi, 2015) that follow a particular line of reasoning and causality in the construction of the ‘problem’:

Funding is provided for investment projects to develop non-agricultural businesses in rural areas. This creates qualified jobs in rural areas or secures existing jobs. This contributes to increasing employment and economic growth in rural areas and thus to the participation of all people in terms of gender equality.

Gefördert werden Investitionsvorhaben zur Entwicklung nichtlandwirtschaftlicher Unternehmen in ländlichen Gebieten. Dadurch werden im ländlichen Raum qualifizierte Arbeitsplätze geschaffen oder vorhandene gesichert. Dies trägt zur Steigerung der Beschäftigung und zum wirtschaftlichen Wachstum in ländlichen Gebieten und somit der Teilhabe aller Menschen im Sinne der Gleichstellung aller Geschlechter bei. (BMEL, 2024c, p. 1759)

This layered hierarchy is visualised in Figure 3 and provides the basis for further inquiries into the contextual embedding and discussion of the identified problem representations.

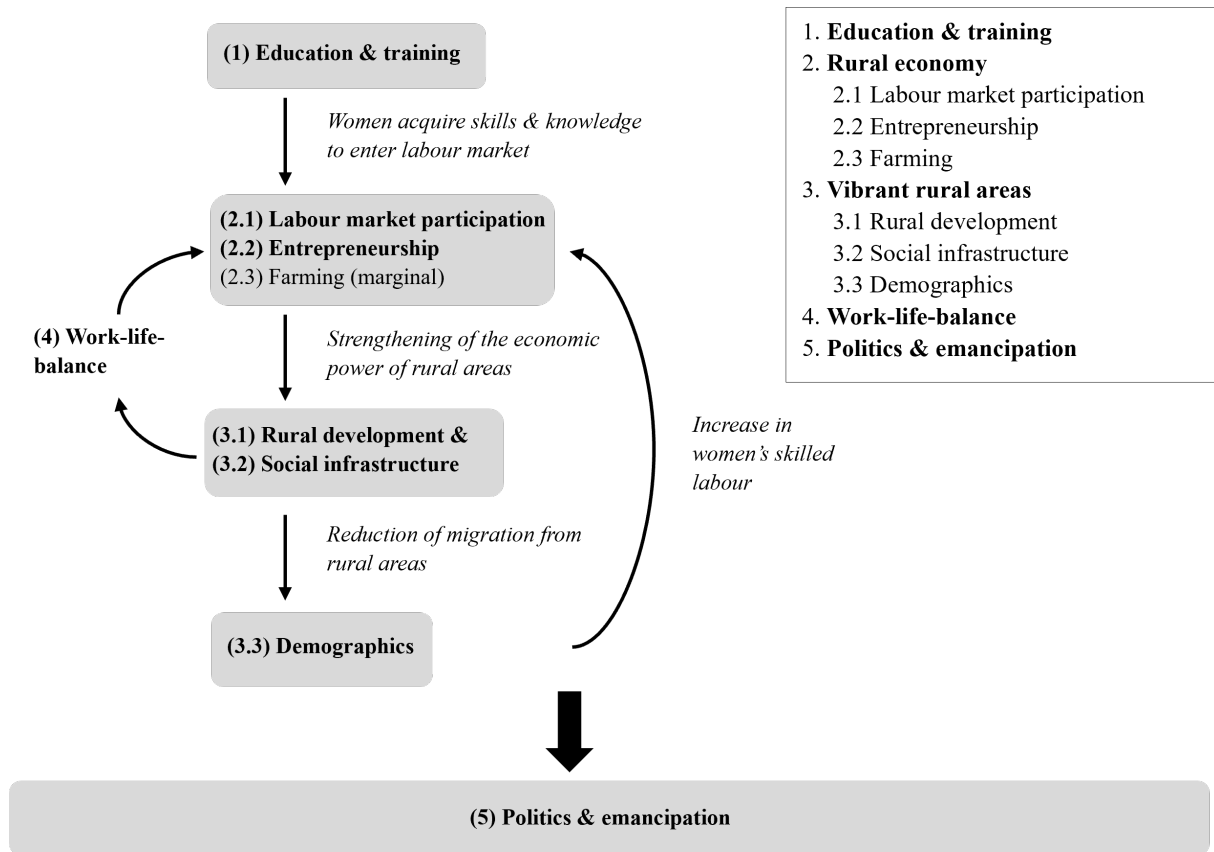


Figure 3: Overview of the main themes and the nested line of arguments presented in the German NSP to address gender inequality in agriculture and rural areas.

Figure 3 shows how problem representations related to the theme ‘politics and emancipation’ are somewhat detached from, or less embedded in representations associated with other themes. Although gender (in)equality is frequently addressed in relation to the subjects of rights, structural discrimination, and governance, statements are often repetitive and isolated from other themes. Further, although many solutions related to the theme are suggested, especially in the needs assessment, few measures are put into place in the policy that respond to the respective problem statements. The construction of problem representations suggests that measures implemented in relation to other themes contribute to gender equality on the structural level. The constitutive effects of gender equality, which is understood primarily as political, economic, and societal participation, however, are largely neglected.

At the root of the causal relationships between the different themes in their relation to gender equality lies the representation of lacking education and knowledge of women as a ‘problem’.

This is treated primarily as a barrier for women to participate in the rural economy and is linked with the associated problem representations of the respective sub-themes. The analysis of problem statements and proposed solutions conveys that especially the themes ‘labour market participation’, ‘entrepreneurship’, ‘rural development’ and ‘social infrastructure’ build the core of the policies’ discourse on gender equality.

Educative measures are expected to increase women’s participation in the labour market through employment or the development of non-agricultural businesses as skilled labour and entrepreneurs. The promotion of non-agricultural entrepreneurship in Baden-Württemberg (EL-0412), for example, is supported by educative measures to improve the “professional, entrepreneurial and personal competences, especially of female entrepreneurs” (*“die fachlichen, unternehmerischen und persönlichen Kompetenzen v.a. der Unternehmerinnen”*, BMEL, 2024a, p. 345). According to the policy, the resulting economic growth and innovative capacity of rural areas is to boost development and the provision of services of general interest. In turn, for women struggling with the compatibility of career, family, and voluntary work, improved accessibility to services reduces the burden of reproductive work, thus removing a barrier to the participation in the labour market. The strengthening of rural areas and employment prospects are also meant to prevent the outmigration of qualified women and their families, further reinforcing economic growth and the vitality of rural areas.

The identification of problem statements and proposed solutions, as well as the interconnections between different thematic contexts, shows that problematisations of gender inequality in the German NSP are complex and multi-layered. Gender (in)equality is addressed on various levels, ranging from knowledge gaps, economic independence, household relations and rural infrastructure to systemic disparities and gender governance. At the core of the identified representations, however, I identify a strong emphasis on the lacking economic participation of women in rural areas, specifically outside of agriculture, as the main requirement for and determinant of the accomplishment of the policy’s gender equality goals. While acknowledging the variety of embedded problem representations, I will approach the WPR questions 2-6 with a focus on this core problematisation, specifically paying attention to subjectification effects (Q5).

6.2.1 *Underlying assumptions*

Challenging taken-for-granted truths and highlighting spaces for contestation requires the interrogation of epistemological and ontological assumptions that shape the unintentional logics of policy proposals (Q2), such as the approaches to and problem representations of gender inequality in the German NSP. Here, gender equality is presented as a goal of the policy and an outcome of the solutions to the problems, as represented in the previously established hierarchy. The logic of gender equality as the ultimate goal rests on assumptions of a linear causality, where interventions contribute to the successful achievement of set goals, such as reaching “equality between all genders and social groups” (“*Gleichstellung aller Geschlechter und sozialen Gruppen*”, BMEL, 2024c, p.35) as formulated in the policy’s needs assessment and given high importance. Gender equality is presented as an attainable and predictive (yet undefined) end state of social relations between men and women without the recognition of possible constitutive effects within the policy that shape the discourse on gender (in)equality in agriculture.

Further, gender inequality is taken for granted as an *external* and uncontested ‘problem’ that the related policy measures respond to. Although gender inequality is discussed in different contexts and thus presented through diverse framings that make up the ‘problem’, it is assumed to be an object that exists outside the policy, instead of being produced within the policy. Thus, in the process of policy formulation, ‘problems’ are identifiable in order to find appropriate solutions.

Both the presented predictive causality and essentialist notions of pre-existing ‘problems’ lay the foundation for a prevalent problem-solving paradigm, especially in approaches to evidence-based policy making as dominating in the EU (Bacchi, 2010; European Commission, 2021; Webb, 2014), including gender policies (European Institute for Gender Equality, 2018; Sauer, 2018; Valkovičová & Meier, 2024). Evidence as a determinant for appropriate solutions assumes the direct accessibility of knowledge as ‘truth’, disregarding power relations in the construction of knowledge (Bacchi, 2010). Despite the lack of specific indicators to evaluate gender equality goals, the CAP and German NSP build on quantifiable evidence that represent the measurable and material status of formulated goals. These positivist ontological and epistemological premises assume that objects, such as gender inequality, exist and can be known objectively, that is, detached from specific interpretations as an object ‘out there’ (Pretorius, 2024).

At the same time, the policy builds on assumptions of an objective yet layered reality. Elaborations on social determinants of gender (in)equality, such as education, economic participation or work-life balance, add a level of complexity to the linear understanding of solutions as responses to ‘problems’. The chain of causality is layered, as representations are nested within each other, to make sense of the social factors that affect the ‘problem’ and thus should be considered strategically in the solution. For example, the policy identifies insufficient rural infrastructures as an influence on women’s choices to seek for employment (following the logic that time constraints in reproductive labour due to the inaccessibility of services of general interest do not allow for time spent on productive labour). The recognition of context and underlying mechanisms in the causal relationship between ‘problem’ and solution adds an interpretivist stance that takes into account the role of social actors in the understanding of the object of inquiry (Bacchi, 2016).

However, the evaluation of contextual factors in the causal chain of problematisations of gender inequality in the German NSP remains focused on women, and thus individuals. Although structural causes of gender inequality are acknowledged (e.g. gender stereotypes), the problematisation that the policy predominantly engages with is the lacking economic participation of women. Thus, the main concern and determinant of gender equality in the policy is women’s behaviour, the effects of which I discuss in the following sub-chapters.

6.2.2 *Women as rural entrepreneurs*

The legal basis of the CAP specifies that member states should put “a particular focus on promoting the participation of women in the socio-economic development of rural areas [. . .]” (“Regulation (EU) 2021/2115”, 2021, (33)), which is implemented in the German NSP through the development of interventions that focus on the economic participation of women, especially as non-agricultural entrepreneurs. The regulation continues:

[. . .] with special attention to farming, supporting women’s key role. Member States should be required to assess the situation of women in farming and address challenges in their CAP Strategic Plan.

The interrogation of how gender inequality is problematised in the German NSP, however, shows that questions of gender (in)equality in an agriculture and farming context are notably disregarded (Q4). Instead, gender (in)equality is specifically discussed in the broader context of rural areas as a driver of economic growth and rural development. Embedded within prominent discourses on women's entrepreneurship and the economisation of gender equality in the EU (Ahl, 2004; Benschop & Verloo, 2006; Berglund et al., 2018; Elomäki, 2015, 2023; Kantola & Lombardo, 2018; Prügl, 2012, 2015; Rönnblom, 2009) the NSP highlights a promising untapped potential of women to contribute to the economic power of rural areas, as the policy states that “in order to secure society's level of prosperity, it is of great importance to exploit all potential for increasing labour market participation, especially among women” (*“Zur Sicherung des gesellschaftlichen Wohlstandsniveaus ist es von großer Bedeutung, sämtliche Potenziale zur Erhöhung der Erwerbsbeteiligung, insbesondere auch von Frauen, auszuschöpfen”*, BMEL, 2024c, p.67).

The problematisation of women's lacking economic participation is underpinned by the policy's efforts to promote non-agricultural entrepreneurship both on and off farms to address gender inequality with the interventions EL-0411 (Investments in the creation and development of non-agricultural activities on farms) and EL-0412 (Promoting investments in the development of non-agricultural businesses in rural areas). The focus on business development constructs women as rural entrepreneurs, while the specification of *non*-agricultural businesses actively denies women entitlement to the subject position as a farmer⁹ (Q5) and invisibilises women farmers' performance of agricultural activities (Q4). The clear distinction between agricultural and non-agricultural activities through the use of a negating prefix (*nicht-landwirtschaftlich*) constructs distinct categories of the masculine space within agriculture, and the female space outside of agriculture.

Investments in the “creation of non-agricultural activities on farms” (*“Schaffung nicht-landwirtschaftlicher Tätigkeiten in landwirtschaftlichen Betrieben”*, BMEL, 2024c, p. 1742) to promote gender

⁹ Even more so in German, as the words for agriculture and farmer share the same root: *Landwirtschaft/landwirtschaftlich* (agriculture/agricultural) and *Landwirt*in* (farmer (male/female)), comparable with the English agronomist).

equality through measure EL-0411 follow this discourse and locate ventures, such as processing and marketing, outside of the masculine, agricultural space:

Diversification activities in different areas are intended to generate additional income **outside of agriculture**, income that goes **beyond primary production**, thereby improving the economic stability and viability of the farms through several pillars. By promoting processing and marketing of products **close to agriculture** the goal is pursued to increase market orientation and increase the added value of the underlying agricultural enterprise and its households.

*Durch die Diversifizierungstätigkeiten in unterschiedlichen Bereichen soll ein **außerlandwirtschaftliches, über die Primärproduktion hinaus gehendes** Zusatzeinkommen generiert und damit die wirtschaftliche Stabilität und Lebensfähigkeit der Betriebe durch mehrere Standbeine verbessert werden. Durch die Förderung im Bereich der Be- und Verarbeitung und Vermarktung **landwirtschaftsnaher** Produkte und Dienstleistungen wird das Ziel einer verstärkten Ausrichtung auf den Markt sowie Steigerung der Wertschöpfung des zu Grund liegenden landwirtschaftlichen Unternehmens und deren Haushalte verfolgt.* (BMEL, 2024c, p. 1743, emphasis added)

Here, activities that go beyond primary production are explicitly situated *outside* of agriculture, and products marketed under the promoted women's entrepreneurship ventures in processing are labelled *close to* agriculture, strengthening again the construction of the masculine, agricultural space, and the female, non-agricultural space and thus, contributing to the marginalisation of women from agriculture (Q5).

In Germany, the processes of marginalisation of women farmers and masculinisation of agriculture have been shaped particularly by post-World War II agricultural and rural policies as constitutive discursive practices on national and EU level (Q3, Q6) (Prügl, 2004, 2011b). While in the 1950s and 1960s in former West Germany the pronounced political commitment to family farming (see chapter 3.1) as a private enterprise opposing collectivism constructed women as housewives and flexible family labour, the gradual liberalisation of agriculture and feminist critique of insufficient social security for spouses in the 1980s and 1990s shifted gender regimes and spaces for contestation and negotiation of gender relations (Pfeffer, 1989; Prügl, 2004, 2010, 2011b).

Especially in the former GDR after unification, the sudden changes in economic organisation and the resulting loss of employment in the dissolved agricultural cooperatives erased important places of self-identification and relations of empowerment for women farmers with serious effects on their lives and wellbeing (Prügl, 2011b; van Hoven, 2004, see also chapter 3.1).

In the 1990s, the introduction of gender mainstreaming in EU policies strengthened women's visibility and "destabilized rural masculinity" (Prügl, 2011a, p. 87) on the one hand, but consolidated an economic framing of gender equality and pushed women further out of agriculture on the other hand (Elomäki, 2023; Prügl, 2012). A neoliberal shift in market organisation provided the space for constructing women as individual economic subjects, beyond the discursive attachment to the unit of the farming family (Elomäki, 2023; Prügl, 2011b). At the same time, women farmers were increasingly dissatisfied with the status as 'spouse' and demanded employment status (Prügl, 2010, 2011b). This space and the momentum for gender equality governance legitimised the highlighting of women's entrepreneurial opportunities within a narrative of both empowerment and economic growth by policymakers. The active promotion and instrumentalisation of the 'economic case for gender equality' (Elomäki, 2015; Smith & Bettio, 2008) starting in the early 2000s was specifically advanced by EU gender equality bodies during the Swedish presidency of the European Council in 2009, but economic and rights-based framings were still contested between different EU institutions (Elomäki, 2023). The economic value of gender equality and the economic participation of women was also highlighted on an international level with the launch of the World Bank Gender Action Plan in 2006, referring to gender equality as "smart economics" (Q6) (World Bank, 2006).

In German agricultural policy the early 2000s were marked by political misconduct during the mad cow crisis, resulting in the resignation of Karl-Heinz Funke as agricultural minister and Renate Künast taking office in 2001 until 2005 (Prügl, 2004). As the first female (and Green party) agricultural minister, Künast's liberal environmentalist agenda advanced an agricultural reform, the 'Agrarwende', promoting sustainable agricultural practices and a multifunctionality discourse that reflected the solidifying economic discourse on gender equality especially in rural policy (Prügl, 2011b).

6.2.3 *Women as autonomous economic subjects*

The valuable contributions of women to the vitality and prosperity of rural areas were increasingly highlighted during Künast's mandate as agricultural minister in the early 2000s (Q3). An official report on the status of agriculture in Germany by the federal government from 2002 states:

Rural women are involved in many different ways in economic, communal and social areas and thus contribute to securing the future of rural areas sustainably. Entrepreneurial initiatives, particularly in the service and marketing sector, are often taken by women, who thus make an important contribution to the family income.

Die Landfrauen engagieren sich in vielfältiger Weise in wirtschaftlichen, kommunalen oder sozialen Bereichen und tragen so zur nachhaltigen Sicherung der Zukunft ländlicher Räume bei. Unternehmerische Initiativen, insbesondere im Dienstleistungs- und Vermarktungsbereich, gehen häufig von Frauen aus, die damit einen wichtigen Beitrag zum Familieneinkommen leisten. (BMEL, 2002 (221))

Various projects were launched to promote gender mainstreaming in rural administration and support women's employment by exploiting new income opportunities in the service sector, marketing, tourism and crafts (BMFSJ, 2004), as well as a study to identify and emphasise women's economic contributions to rural areas (Becker et al., 2006; BMEL, 2002). The growing discourse on income diversification and the multifunctionality of farms was accompanied by a focus on female difference that constructed women as particularly suited for entrepreneurial ventures as "compared to men, women have special skills that are indispensable for village/regional development" ("*Frauen verfügen im Vergleich zu Männern über besondere Kompetenzen, die für die dörfliche / regionale Entwicklung unverzichtbar sind*", Prügl, 2011b; Putzing, 2005, p. 10).

Essentialist assumptions about specific skills that women have or not have compared to men are still visible in the German NSP. Although not addressed as explicitly, the promotion of women's entrepreneurship in a discourse on diversification and multifunctionality and the construction of these non-agricultural entrepreneurial spaces as feminine as opposed to the masculine, agricultural space, reproduce essentialist assumptions about female difference (Q2). Women farmers' experiences, however, show that activities that are considered entrepreneurial

and innovative and are employed for a discourse on female difference, such as direct marketing and processing, are often a strategy to manage experiences of discrimination, as they foster autonomy and self-determination and reduce dependence on heteronormative spaces and relations (see also chapter 3.1; Pieper et al., 2023).

While the commodification of ‘female competences’ in the name of gender equality and economic growth visibilises women’s work and fosters economic independence, it also constructs and prescribes a particular kind of new femininity based on the male gendered model of entrepreneurship and neoliberal rationalities of the innovative, resourceful, and determined autonomous self (Q5) (Berglund et al., 2023; Gill & Scharff, 2011; Prügl, 2011b). The recent study on women farmers’ experiences in Germany shows that identity struggles resulting from external social expectations persist, as especially young women farmers feel pressured by the image of the ‘power woman’ mastering the balance between productive and reproductive labour without difficulty (Bolten et al., 2024). As Ahl (2004, p. 61) writes, “Being a woman and an entrepreneur at the same time means that one has to position oneself simultaneously in regard to two conflicting discourses”. The subjectification processes at play that regulate femininities require women to actively and continuously harmonise the embodiment of ‘masculine’ and ‘feminine’ practices “as a means of performing acceptable organizational femininities” (Lewis et al., 2017, p. 218). The focus away from the collective struggle for social and political change to the self-transformation of the individual (woman), to agency and empowerment, is at the root of both neoliberal and postfeminist rationalities (Gill & Scharff, 2011; Lewis et al., 2017; Prügl, 2015). Understood as discursive formations that govern how women perform femininities through the (de-)legitimation of practices and behaviours, neoliberal and postfeminist discourses are closely associated in the construction of gendered subjectivities. Following Gill and Scharff (2011), Lewis et al. (2017, p. 215) emphasise:

a compelling similarity that exists between the independent, entrepreneurial, self-managing, calculating subject of neoliberalism and the agentic, responsible, choosing, self-fashioning subject of postfeminism.

Here, postfeminism is not understood as a rejection of feminism, but as a moderated and selective reconfiguration of feminism that focuses on the individual subject and undermines

transformative action as well as invisibilising feminism as a collective struggle (Q4) (Berglund et al., 2018, 2023; Lewis et al., 2017). These processes of neoliberalisation of feminism highlight individual responsibility (of women) and in turn neglect relationships of conflict (Prügl, 2015; Rönnblom, 2009). The assumption of inherent biological difference that the commodification of difference is based on constructs women as “a homogeneous group either in need of support or as a resource to development and growth [. . .].” (Rönnblom, 2009, p. 118), disregarding differences between women and their diverse experiences and voices (Q4, Q5) (Berglund et al., 2023). It also (re-)produces the categories of men and women as accepted genders, silencing the experiences and realities of gender-diverse people in agricultural and rural areas and invisibilising the hegemonic masculinities and cis-heteronormative rationalities that make gender inequities possible and construct gender as binary (Q4).

Overall, the production of difference based on privilege and power relations, such as women farmers’ strategies for autonomy and self-determination as a response to gender-based discrimination, is neglected, contributing to the depoliticisation of gender equality in agriculture (Bacchi & Eveline, 2003; Rönnblom, 2009). Recognising and addressing these politics of power can open up spaces to rethink and challenge the gender regimes as produced by neoliberal and postfeminist discursive practices in the agricultural and rural context (Q4). Considering Foucault’s conceptualisation of power as productive, dominant power relations and associated discourses are not inevitable and persistent, but spaces for contestation and negotiation, and thus resistance, are situated within. For example, the German NSP addresses the ‘problem’ of women’s insufficient accessibility to services of general interest and employment close to home as a cause for struggles in the reconciliation of career and family (see chapter 6.1.5). Engaging critically with power relations *within* this discourse instead can shed light on the discursive practices that legitimise persisting gendered divisions of reproductive and productive labour that construct women as primary caregivers in the first place, making it possible to imagine different gender relations and constellations of power.

Thus, to re-politicise discourses on gender (in)equality in agriculture, it is imperative to challenge the status of policies as merely reactive to pre-defined ‘problems’ and instead interrogate accepted truths and underlying assumptions that produce implicit problem representations. An investigation into the (discursive) practices that legitimise these problematisations can help to challenge the

perceived inevitability of dominant discourses and make room for the renegotiation of power relations.

7 LIMITATIONS

This research is not without limitations. As I have established already in chapter 5.1, it does not produce generalisable results that directly inform the development of practical policy solutions or suggestions. However, more insights from case studies examining different member states' NSPs could eventually inform policy decision-making processes on the integration of gender equality goals in EU agricultural policy.

Although the case study provides valuable and relevant insights into the constitutive effects of discourses on gender (in)equality in the German NSP, time constraints influenced the extent and depth to which the research question could be interrogated. The WPR framework was applied only to (relevant sections of) the official policy text, while the identified discourses and subjectification processes are embedded within a larger landscape of policies and other documents that could provide additional insights and context when examined with a WPR lens.

The WPR questions themselves are incredibly complex, and given the scope of this thesis, I had to prioritise and compromise, which is why I chose to focus mainly on the subjectification effects (Q5). To ensure an engagement with all WPR questions, I chose to approach Question 3 (as arguably the most complex question) with a genealogical sensibility toward the interrogated subjectification processes. However, this does not replace a comprehensive genealogy of the identified problem representations and related processes of legitimisation, which would provide more in-depth insights. Further, I interrogated what I identified as the central problem representation of gender inequality, while other related problematisations (see themes) were not explored specifically through the analytical lenses of the WPR questions.

8 CONCLUSIONS

Efforts to include gender perspectives in EU policymaking to promote equality goals are increasingly reaching agricultural policy and have culminated in the recent incorporation of gender equality into CAP objectives, obliging member states to address persisting gender-based discrimination in agriculture and rural areas. However, policies remain to be perceived as reactions to specific ‘problems’, disregarding the productive effects of dominant discourses and problem representations within policies that risk the (re-)production of the ‘problems’ they are aiming to address. In this thesis, I interrogated the representations of gender inequality as a ‘problem’ in the German NSP and the constitutive effects of embedded discourses by applying Carol Bacchi’s ‘What’s the problem represented to be?’ approach. I questioned underlying assumptions and silences, as well as the (historical) practices contributing to the legitimisation of the identified core problem representation.

I find that gender inequality is represented as a complex and layered ‘problem’ (SRQ1 – How is gender inequality represented as a problem?). The policy problematises *(1) women’s lack of knowledge and skills* as a cause for *(2) insufficient access to non-agricultural employment and business opportunities*, further exacerbated by *(3) the structural weakness of rural areas*, which in turn contributes to the *migration of women from rural areas*, as well as *(4) women’s insufficient accessibility to services of general interest and employment close to home*. According to the policy, addressing these ‘problems’ improves *(5) the lack of opportunities for women for economic, political, and social participation free from discrimination*. However, for the core problem representation of the policy’s discourse on gender (in)equality I identify *women’s lacking economic participation in rural areas*.

The policy’s dominant discourses on gender (in)equality in agriculture are embedded in broader postfeminist discourses and the economisation of gender equality in the EU. The promotion of women’s non-agricultural entrepreneurship to improve economic participation as the main strategy to reach gender equality goals creates women as rural entrepreneurs and autonomous economic subjects and specifically denies the subject position as a farmer (SRQ2 – What kind of specific subjects are created through these problem representations?).

Based on these findings I argue that, in order to challenge gender-based discrimination in agriculture in policymaking, the CAP and member states' NSPs need to be recognised as productive practices that are constitutive of gender inequality in agriculture as a 'problem'. In the case of the German NSP, the findings suggest that the promotion of women's non-agricultural entrepreneurship in the policy may challenge rural masculinities by visibilising women's labour contributions and fostering economic independence, thus renegotiating and shifting gender relations. However, the male privilege of authority over agricultural spaces, including property rights and the subject position as farmer, is reinforced and the construction of women as specifically *non*-agricultural rural entrepreneurs contributes to a discourse that marginalises women from agriculture and reproduces gender as binary (RQ – What are the constitutive effects of the discourses on gender inequality in agriculture in the German NSP?).

Further (comparative) research on gender (in)equality discourses in other EU member states' NSPs can expand the knowledge base on different processes of legitimisation that contribute to broader EU discourses and discursive practices on gender (in)equality in agriculture. This can help to find ways in which an interrogation of problematisations can be integrated into policymaking processes to bring the political struggle for gender equality back onto the agenda of EU agricultural policy and renegotiate gender relations.

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APPENNDIX

Table 2: Codebook documenting deductive (based on the WPR framework) and inductive codes and sub-codes, including a definition and example for each (sub-)code.

Main Code	Subcode	Definition	Example
Deductive			
Problem representation		Statements that refer to the necessity to improve a certain issue or situation associated with gendered experiences, e.g. through the use of words with negative connotations (e.g. ‘weak’, ‘lacking’, ‘inequality’), or as ‘weaknesses’ and ‘threats’ in SWOT analyses	The political participation of women in rural areas remains weak (<i>“Die politische Teilhabe von Frauen ist in ländlichen Gebieten weiterhin schwach”</i>) (BMEL, 2024c, p. 71)
Proposed solution		Suggested measures, interventions and goals to improve a condition perceived as negative (i.e. problem representation) associated with gendered experiences	Increasing employment and entrepreneurship/start-ups, especially among women (<i>“Steigerung der Erwerbstätigkeit und des Unternehmertums/Existenzgründungen/Start ups insbesondere von Frauen”</i>) (BMEL, 2024c, p. 62)
Inductive			
Education & training		Problem statements and suggested solutions that relate to the improvement, acquisition or lack of knowledge or skills	DE1-EL-0802-01-0-01 - Coaching measures for women in rural areas (DE1-EL-0802-01-0-01 – <i>“Coachingmaßnahmen für Frauen im Ländlichen Raum”</i>) (BMEL, 2024c, p. 1891)

Main Code	Subcode	Definition	Example
Politics & emancipation		Problem statements and suggested solutions that relate to equal economic, social and political rights, addressing structural discrimination at a societal level (e.g. equality and equity, participation, recognition, stereotypes), as well as equality governance (e.g. gender mainstreaming, parity, equity frameworks)	Equal economic, political and social opportunities for participation for women (<i>„Gleiche wirtschaftliche, politische und gesellschaftlichen Teilhabechancen für Frauen“</i>) (BMEL, 2024c, p. 71)
Work-life balance		Problem statements and suggested solutions that relate to the compatibility of productive and reproductive labour	Multiple burdens on women due to family, career and voluntary work. (<i>„Mehrfachbelastung von Frauen durch Familie, Beruf und Ehrenamt“</i>) (BMEL, 2024c, p. 339)
Rural economy	Entrepreneurship	Problem statements and suggested solutions that relate to the creation of new businesses in rural areas	DE1-EL-0412-00-0-01 - Investments in the development of non-agricultural activities by women in rural areas (<i>„DE1-EL-0412-00-0-01 - Investitionen in die Entwicklung nicht lw. Tätigkeiten durch Frauen in Ländl. Gebieten“</i>)(BMEL, 2024c, p. 1766)
	Farming	Problem statements and suggested solutions that specifically relate to the agricultural context and agricultural activities	Low proportion of young female farmers as farm managers (<i>„Geringer Anteil von Junglandwirtinnen als Betriebsleiterinnen“</i>) (BMEL, 2024c, p. 309)
	Labour market participation	Problem statements and suggested solutions that relate to the (lack of) participation in productive labour (employment opportunities, access to employment)	The aim of this support for projects specifically for women in rural areas is therefore to develop income and employment prospects close to home [. . .] (<i>„Ziel dieser Förderung von Vorhaben speziell für Frauen im ländlichen Raum ist es daher, zum einen wohnortnahe Einkommens- und Beschäftigungsperspektiven zu erschließen [. . .].“</i>) (BMEL, 2024c, p. 345)

Main Code	Subcode	Definition	Example
Vibrant rural areas	Rural development	Problem statements and suggested solutions that relate to the prosperity and structural and economic development potential of rural areas	Considering future challenges and new development trends, maintaining the innovative strength of rural areas will continue to require skilled labour. Here, qualified female specialists also harbour great potential for rural areas. (<i>„Im Hinblick auf zukünftige Herausforderungen und neue Entwicklungstrends setzt die Erhaltung der Innovationskraft des Ländlichen Raumes weiterhin Fachkräftesicherung zwingend voraus. Hier bergen auch qualifizierte weibliche Fachkräfte viel Potenzial für den Ländlichen Raum.“</i>) (BMEL, 2024c, p. 66)
	Social infrastructure	Problem statements and suggested solutions that relate to rural support infrastructures, i.e. the access to and provision of services of general interest	The necessity arises from the lack of social infrastructure (e.g. childcare facilities) in the many rural areas there [Baden-Württemberg] (<i>„Die Notwendigkeit ergibt sich aus mangelnden sozialen Infrastrukturen (z. B. Kinderbetreuungseinrichtungen) in dortigen vielen ländlichen Gebieten.“</i>) (BMEL, 2024c, p. 345)
	Demographics	Problem statements and suggested solutions that relate to (changes in) the composition of the rural population	[...] to promote the equivalence of living conditions and to prevent emigration, especially of women, and to ensure the influx of young families in particular (<i>„[...] die Gleichwertigkeit der Lebensverhältnisse zu fördern und die Abwanderung, insbesondere auch von Frauen, vorzubeugen sowie um Zuzug insbesondere junger Familien, sicherzustellen.“</i>) (BMEL, 2024c, p. 344)