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Peas in a pod? Gender mainstreaming and design thinking process

Gender Mainstreaming (GM) refers to a widely adopted strategy to achieve gender equality at the national, regional, and international levels since the late 20th century. In preparation for the launch of the 2030 Development Agenda (the Sustainable Development Goals), it has been reconceptualized with a programme approach in the UN Women's framework; almost simultaneously, the European Union advances the GM agenda by designating institutional reform as one of its objectives. Similarly important in the field of innovation, the Design Thinking Process (DTP), developed mainly by Stanford University D-School faculty, has been diffused into and endorsed by many prestigious higher education institutions around the world in the past 15 years to cultivate creativity in students for their futures. Seemingly rather unrelated and situated in two disparate fields, both GM and GTP emphasize a human-centred and evidence-based process, which solidifies problem-solving and perspective-taking skills. More strikingly common between the two is the fact that the problems are rarely the participants' own so that they need to step out of their habitual zones to assess and even understand other people's needs, experiences, and points-of-view.

The paper tends to compare the reinvented GM in recent international benchmark documents and the Stanford innovation model. The comparison suggests that, in addition to their similarities, both can enrich each other with their distinct particularities in a synergetic manner to optimize own efficiency and ultimate success. For example, Design Thinking Process could encourage a higher level of creativity and imagination in the making of governmental policies and measures, while gender mainstreaming in its global-scope application might bring the innovation industry up to par with the human rights principle of substantive equality, which would essentialize a social justice dimension to the current market-oriented innovation industry.