



CULTURE, CUSTOM AND CARING

*A supplement to the final report from
the external evaluator*

Project nr. VS/220/0229

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Introduction

This is a supplement to a final report for the project Culture, custom and caring – men’s and women’s possibilities to parental leave. The supplement is presented by the external project evaluator which is the University of Akureyri Research Institute¹ (UARI). The evaluation has been carried out by Kjartan Olafsson, M.A. in sociology and researcher at the UARI.

As stated in the application, the project coordination contracted the UARI as the external project evaluator. Part 1.10 of the application described the monitoring and evaluation of the project activities. The formal role of the external evaluator in the project was to finalize this part of the project. This report will present the views of the external evaluator as to what extent the project has been successful in achieving its goals as described in the application. But also the external evaluator will use this opportunity to discuss some other important issues related to the project.

¹ The University of Akureyri Research Institute was founded in 1992 as an independent institute, although operating under the umbrella of the University of Akureyri and is mainly funded by various contract assignments. The role of the institute is to facilitate and support research within the University of Akureyri and act as a link between the University, other organizations and the private sector.

The Monitoring and evaluation strategies:

The application stated that the evaluation would be carried out by the University of Akureyri Research Institute and would be done in a threefold manner:

Firstly, a representative from the research institute will be present at project meetings where he will consult with the project partners on the progress of the project.

Secondly, the research institute will analyse and evaluate the results of the project and compare them with the data used.

Thirdly, a mail survey will be implemented at the end of the project, by sending it to the project partners.

The external evaluator has performed the first two of these but has deemed it unnecessary to implement the mail survey as he has already gathered the information intended from the survey, through consultations at the project meetings.

- The external evaluator was present at all four meetings of the trans-national steering committee. These were held 29.-30. November 2002 in Berlin, Germany; 10.-12. April 2003 in Valencia, Spain; 10.-11. October 2003 in Trondheim, Norway; 5. March 2004 in Akureyri, Iceland. This has proven to be necessary to observe the dialogue between the partners forming the basis for some of the key decisions in the project. *It is the view of the external evaluator that the key decisions regarding the project have been the results of open and active dialogue between all project partners.*
- The Centre for Women's and Gender Studies at the University of Iceland was responsible for the co-ordination of the research part of the project. The process of the research was so that data collection (quantitative and qualitative) was carried out by partners in each country and then the Centre for Women's and Gender Studies had the task of analysing and summarizing the data from each country as well as performing the Icelandic part of the study. The external evaluator received a copy of all data sent to the CWGS and had the opportunity to do cross-comparisons of the key findings of the report with the original data. *It is the view of the external evaluator that the research part of the project is of good quality and the key findings of the research report are in good harmony with the data collected.*
- A representative from the UARI has consulted with the project coordination in Iceland on several occasions and been present at key meetings, e.g. between the project co-ordination and the film team. This has given the external evaluator the opportunity to observe closely how the project coordination has been handling various aspects of the project. It was clearly a challenging task for the project co-ordination to finalize the

project within the given timeframe however: *It is the view of the external evaluator that the project coordination has been responding adequately to various difficulties in the progress of the project.*

Operational objectives:

The operational objectives of the project were described in the application in the following way:

- a) To draw up a picture of how parents reconcile work and family life.*
- b) To describe the provisions enabling parents to reconcile work and family life, according to take-up rates and employment effects.*
- c) To provide a detailed analysis of the legislation of paternity leave and the take-up rates for different groups of men.*
- d) To provide a better understanding of existing data with case studies (in-depth interviews with parents with small children).*

These objectives were mainly reached in the research report published by the Centre for Gender Equality in Iceland and the Centre for Women's and Gender Studies but also in the documentary film which was made and based on the research report. The research report draws up a detailed picture of the institutional arrangements of parental leave in the four participating countries and links them to the stories of individuals making decisions based on the options available to them. However the discussions of the report are not merely confined to describing the four countries but aim at a more general understanding of how parents solve the task of caring for their children and how the decisions they make are both based on the institutional framework and the culture of the society. *It is the view of the external evaluator that the project has reached the operational objectives.*

Quantitative and qualitative achievement indicators:

The application describes both quantitative and qualitative achievement indicators. The quantitative indicators were defined as:

- 1) *Is the intended data collected?*
- 2) *Are the described comparisons between groups and countries carried out?*

Both of these have been achieved. As for the first indicator, the findings of the research report are based on gender divided information on labour participation, unemployment rate, part time employment, average weekly working hours and on information on fertility rates and proportion of children in day care. Also the report provides detailed information on parental leave schemes and the use of parental leave. These quantitative data are supplemented by 24 in-depth interviews. As for the second indicator the report addresses the differences between groups and countries as proposed in the application. *It is the view of the external evaluator that the project has collected the data described in the application and carried out the proposed comparisons between groups and countries.*

In addition to the quantitative indicators the following qualitative indicators were also defined in the application:

- 1) *As the main output of the project is increased knowledge it is important to see whether it is passed on to those most likely to benefit from it.*
- 2) *It is important also that the case studies be carried out in a manner likely to improve understanding of the data.*

The qualitative indicators are perhaps the most relevant ones to this particular project. The main goal of the project is to raise awareness and promote discussions among the general public on men's and women's possibilities to parental leave. It is clear that this can not be achieved through traditional research reports. Therefore the project chose to present the findings of the research part of the project in a documentary film. This is by no means a simple task and puts a heavy demand on the co-operation between the film-makers and the researchers. It is in fact admirable that the project has managed only since December 2002 to perform not only a complicated research project, but also to produce a documentary film based on the findings. The Icelandic State Broadcasting Service has agreed to promote and distribute the documentary film through the European Broadcasting Union (EBU). *It is the view of the external evaluator that the documentary film is likely to achieve the goals of the project as to raising awareness and promoting discussion on the topic in question.*

Some general points

The project Culture, Custom and Caring has of course had its ups and downs during the project period. Already in the beginning the project co-ordination was faced with the problem of two of the original partners cancelling their participation. It is the understanding of the external evaluator that both partners had signed letters of intent and thereby declared their full commitment to the project. It is the view of the external evaluator that such commitment should extend beyond changes in personnel or the interest of individuals but mean that the partners involved actually intend to participate in the project. Luckily, the project managed to locate a new partner in Spain and as it turned out the four participating countries formed a very dedicated and able partnership.

A second problem was changes in the project leadership. The Centre for Gender Equality decided to hire a special project leader which had not been involved in the application process since none of the Centre's permanent staff had the possibility to lead the project. This was clearly the second-best option in a project operating under a rather tight time schedule. Half-way through the project this person had no longer the possibility to act as a project leader due to unforeseen personal matters. Then the director of the Centre for Gender Equality decided to take on the responsibility of a project leader herself. However within a month she had to resign from office due to matters not related to the project. Then a new (in fact the fourth) project leader was hired. As it turned out, this proved to be very positive for the project since this last project leader was able to pick up the pieces and finalize the project. It is the view of the external evaluator that the successful conclusion of the project is to a large extent due to the commitment and persistency of the last project leader. Also, it should be stressed that all decisions made by the Centre for Gender Equality regarding the project leadership have been made in best interest of the project based on circumstances at that time.

During the course of the project both the project co-ordination and the project partners consulted with the representative of the UARI in connection with various matters and decisions. The external evaluator did offer his advice and was willing to express his views on various matters concerning the project making it clear at the same time though, that all decisions had to be made by the project co-ordination.

Conclusions

The project Culture, Custom and Caring – Men’s and women’s possibilities to parental leave, is definitely an ambitious attempt to raise awareness and promote discussions on an important topic. It is the view of the external evaluator that the results of the project as presented in the research report and the documentary film are likely to achieve the goals of the project.