

EVALUATION OF THE FINNISH STRUCTURAL FUND PROGRAMMES FOR THE PERIOD 2000 – 2006 FROM THE GENDER PERSPECTIVE.

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In spite of a decade long effort to mainstream gender equality in both structural policy and its evaluation, very little progress has taken place. One of the reasons for the slow advancement is that in most cultures great resistance still exists towards the promotion of equality between the sexes, which is also reflected in the way that structural policy is implemented. For example, in Finland the slogan prevails that “there is no need for equal opportunities as we are already so equal”.

As the program period of 2000-2006 has reached its midway, it can already be seen that gender equality has been mainstreamed better into these programs than in the earlier period. Evaluations of all programs from the gender perspective can be regarded as an indication that equality has been institutionalised into the programming of structural policies.

In practice, however, implementing gender equality is quite challenging, since it means a systematic integration of equality in the objectives of the programs as well as in the targeting of the measures to those areas and arenas of life that are important from the point of view of equality. Also the resourcing of gender-sensitive measures is an influential factor, because it has an impact on the measures themselves and consequently on the amount and nature of the projects.

The aim of this article is to discuss some of the features that have emerged from the thematic evaluations from the gender perspective concerning the Finnish structural fund programs, funded by the European Social Fund (Objective 3 and Equal) as well as the programs Objective 1 and Objective 2, during the period 2000-2003.

Programming gender equality into the programmes

For the purpose of engendering evaluations, we constructed an extensive evaluation methodology. It consisted of a package of methods and techniques, such as the analysis of the structure, content, target areas and beneficiaries of the program (including a special “gender filter” of the measures), in addition to the analysis of the project registers and specific surveys. On the basis of the thematic evaluations, it is evident that equality has been “programmed” into the programmes fairly well, although varyingly. Some of the programs that have overall insufficiencies from the gender perspective, like the Objective 3, has been able to compensate the flaws by greater funding to gender-sensitive measures. In general, the programs which have a stronger gender-relevance seem to produce more gender-sensitive projects.

Nevertheless, there is a significant gap between the gender-sensitivity of the programming and the amount of gender-sensitive projects. The programs have allocated 22 to 70% of their resources to gender-sensitive measures, which has resulted only in some 12 – to 40% of projects that are gender-sensitive. An other problem is that the projects have, so far, contributed mostly to the areas of labour markets, education and training, and least to enterprises and economic growth, participation, and the reconciliation of work and family-life which, according to the European Commission, are also significant areas of action in the promotion of equal opportunities. In addition to the five areas, mentioned above, the enhancement of self-esteem and coping skills seems to be an other most important category. The lack of significant areas of support means that structural policy has not had an impact on areas that are important from the perspective of equality policy.

The invisibility of women's results

The evaluations reveal that the main results, i.e. new and maintained jobs, and new enterprises contain more male than female actors. Women's results tend to be qualitative and inconspicuous as they belong to the category of development with long term results rather than to direct interventions that try to increase employment. The current monitoring system and indicators do not do justice to the women's results. In fact, the measurement of effectiveness with non-compatible indicators will eventually lead to wrong conclusions. Especially projects that belong to the category of positive action tend to deal with the improvement of the quality of life, professional identity or social cohesion, which are difficult to measure in a quantitative way.

However, some of the gender-sensitive projects contain important best practices. One of them is "Karelli, as a model to the world" which presents an innovative mode of women's networking around their body, home, community and the whole region, in addition to extensive international liaising. Karelli has recently turned into a limited company with male shareholders as well.

Future challenges to structural policy from the gender perspective

Irrespective of the advances in gender mainstreaming structural fund interventions, compared to the previous period, a great deal of work still remains to be done. Although equality has had a double position as both a horizontal and a strategic theme, for example in the ESF-frame of reference that guides the programs that are resourced from this fund, equality has remained subjugated by other horizontal themes, such as sustainable development, information society, partnership and anticipation. Thus, one of the greatest challenges is to increase the gender awareness of the whole administrative personnel both nationally, regionally and locally so that it would have the capacity to steer and advice how to implement a gender sensitive structural policy. According to our surveys, the majority of administration regards equality as the sameness of men and women. Instead of sensitivity to gender differences, gender neutrality is often striven at. We hope that extensive gender training of all the participants might not only increase awareness in general, but also improve the current operational weaknesses the implementation which include the difficulties to manage equality-oriented projects that tend to have predominately qualitative outcomes and the selection of pertinent projects that target the most meaningful areas of action from the gender perspective. In addition, more support to female entrepreneurship and to the reconciliation of work and family life are also needed.

Last but not least, the greatest challenge concerns the relevance of structural policies from the gender perspective. Structural policy provides a great opportunity for women to implement their projects and to transform through them the structures and conditions of everyday life in a globalising world. Nevertheless, several researchers have pointed out that as long as the mobilisation of women takes place within the traditional paradigm of planning and development, which implies a set of hierarchically controlled, top-down procedures, no real progress can take place. In practice, most policies are already being implemented through networks. Therefore, the objective of fair structural policy should imply the creation of networks of both competitiveness and social cohesion. Encouraging signs of this new paradigm can be seen in the current Equality and Innovative pilot programs that are based on the creation of networked partnerships. The implementation of this kind of policy and programs requires a conscious networking design, like the ones that have been demonstrated in the gender-sensitive best practice projects. The network design gives space for different kinds of developmental seeds that might in the long run bring forth innovations and competencies that women and men, old and young will benefit of.

Equality between women and men does not emerge automatically through structural policy. On the contrary, it needs constant support and "active doing of gender", which requires on-going

monitoring and evaluation. In this context, the task of gender-sensitive evaluation is to watch constantly the relevance of the policy, programs and the way how they have been implemented.