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Workshop 6: Gendering Equality in Practice

Implementing equal pay policy in a right wing context: Clash between gender equality and corporatism

MILJA SAARI, UNIVERSITY OF HELSINKI

MILJA.SAARI@HELSINKI.FI

JOHANNA KANTOLA, UNIVERSITY OF HELSINKI,

JOHANNA.KANTOLA@HELSINKI.FI



The Case of “Nancy the Nurse”



“Nancy the Nurse”, an illustration in the National Coalition’s platform and electoral campaign material in 2007 (National Coalition Party platform 2007).

- 2007: the right wing National Coalition Party made an election promise to Nancy the Nurse (the generic figure of the underpaid highly educated female nurse) to increase her salary by 500 Euros
- after the elections, the nurses’ trade unions held the new prime ministerial party into account for its election promise
- > exceptional policy process where the government and its **equal pay measure overrode the traditional corporatist system** where pay is agreed upon between social partners, and dictated these organizations to give a pay increase to qualified and educated women in female dominated jobs in the public sector in which salaries were too small compared to the demands of the work

Research design

- Was gender equality realized in practice and were there increases in the nurses pay and a reduction in the gender pay gap?
 - gender & class (in the next phase also race/ethnicity: care assistants)
- Which factors led to the failure in the implementation?
 - male dominated corporatist processes, trade unions and employers' organizations
 - discursive structures
- What happens to the gender equality perspective in the implementation process?

Our research material:

- media stories
- interviews with key actors (still going on)
- policy documents by the government and the labor market organizations
- wage statistics

Theoretical framework

- A theoretical and methodological challenge: hardly any empirical research into gender and corporatism in Finland
 - aim: to theorize the implementation of gender equality policies within a corporatist system
 - Feminist institutionalism, implementation gender equality policies (GEPP)
 - formal and informal institutions, practices, discourses, norms, and critical actors
 - the vagueness of gender equality objectives and resistance towards gender equality work
 - critical actors, feminist change agents
 - Challenge: both the political nature of policy implementation and the dynamics related to our particular policy area
- > In what ways gender equality in corporatist procedures is informed by understandings of what is *legitimate*?
- > How constructions of gender equality and legitimacy involve power relations?

Finnish context: equal pay

- Finland and other Nordic countries are regarded as the most gender-equal countries in the world
- Yet, the gender pay gap in Finland is still 16,6 %
 - no significant change since 1985 -> one of the main gender equality themes in Finnish gender equality policies since 1960's
 - today men earn 7600 € more than women annually
- One of the main interests of nurses' trade unions has been equal pay -> the Union of Health and Social Care Professionals (Tehy): an active lobbyist for equal pay and better salaries for nurses
 - Tehy: strikes in 1963, 1983 and 1995 + threat of mass resignation in 2007
 - Salaries in Finland: all wage earners 3 308 €/month, women 3 003 €/month, men 3 625 €/month (difference 622 €)
 - in municipalities: practical nurses 2 630 €/month, nurses 3 055 €/month, senior nursing officer 4056 €/month (physicians 6500 €/month)

Finnish context: corporatism and TUPO-settlements

Corporatism

- both the trade unions and employer confederations are well organized: the trade union density is 64,5 % (women 70 %, men 59 %)
- 1968—2006 “TUPO-time”: general agreements on terms and conditions of employment, also the level of pay rises, were negotiated in tripartite cooperation as a part of *centralised labour market settlements (TUPO)*
 - the government and the employees’ and employers’ confederations reached a consensus between the interests of national competitiveness (state), economic growth (employers) and wages (employees)
 - covered a wide range of economic and political issues, such as salaries, taxation, pensions and unemployment benefits
 - also equal pay allowances , but tiny in their size
- “No tripartite consensus on what to do to equal pay -> no effective measures to promote equal pay via TUPO-settlements”

Union rounds in 2007

- Union rounds (=collective bargaining on a union level) have usually meant higher wage increases than those in TUPO-settlements in which the government compensates moderate raises with taxation benefits for employees and employers
- Employers wanted to shift the wage bargaining from central level to local level, trade unions wanted bigger pay increases than in TUPO-settlements -
> wide support for union rounds
- In 2008, a global financial crisis started
 - the collective agreements after the union rounds in 2007 included considerable pay rises for a time period of 2007-2011
 - TUPOs came back in 2011: the traditional Finnish way of coping with global economy has been the tripartite cooperation which is based on a lowest common denominator
 - usually gender equality and equal pay measures are sold first in a trade-off between the government and social partners

1st Act: Making of Nancy the Nurse a political phenomenon



Kaleva newspaper 17.10.2007 <http://www.kaleva.fi/uutiset/pohjois-suomi/lapissa-hoitajien-tyotaistelu-tyhjentaissi-osastot/40153/>

- 2007 was a historical momentum for Tehy: there were parliamentary elections, new government and its platform, and also the collective agreements were to be renewed the same year.
 - Tehy had campaigned for pay rises for nurses since the summer 2005
 - campaign was carefully and strategically planned in the Tehy leadership
 - lobbied both in the party political arena and among Tehy's partnership organizations to gain a broad support base for their demands.
- Aim: to build up pressure to
- get the pay rises for qualified nurses included in the future government's platform
 - get ear-marked higher pay rises in the collective agreement in the municipal sector

1st Act: Making of Nancy the Nurse a political phenomenon

- Public sector salaries have not commonly been determined through political decision-making but in negotiations between employers' organizations and trade unions
- In terms of the corporatist practices, this centrality of two actors, Tehy and the National Coalition Party, challenged the common practice that the export sector determines the general level of pay increases, and the public sector does not go beyond this



Taloussanommat newspaper
13.9.2007:Jenkkiisar tienaa paljon
enemmän
(in the picture, the sign says : Nurses'
salaries suck.

- There were significant cracks within the trade unions
 - SuPer, the union for practical nurses, decided to accept the employers offer for agreement; Tehy was not satisfied but wanted a better increase
 - Other trade unions, such as public sector workers JHL and teachers OAJ became highly critical of Tehy too and opposed a separate agreement for nurses
- Absolute centrality of figures and numbers in framing the political battle: the role of the state in corporatist practices when advancing pay equality – where left to little attention, when numbers took the stage
- The reached agreement (dated 19.11.2007) is very complex and in its aftermath there were different interpretations of what was achieved

2nd act: Keeping the promises: implementation of the “500 euros”



Suomen Kuvalehti magazine 13.9.2009

The government tried to retreat back to its normal passive role by emphasizing that it didn't want to be part of these negotiations but wanted to leave it to the two parties – nurses resisted fiercely

Implementation problems:

- the government platform did not specify which were the professions and tasks that would be entitled to the increases
- the collapse of the bargaining organ TNJ and the changes it caused for the structures and processes of local bargaining in the health sector in municipalities
- the tense environment for local bargaining which was caused by the inflamed atmosphere at the workplace level
- the lack of knowhow which was an actual problem because of the two agreements and their different pay increases at different times depending whether the employee belonged to Tehy or not

3rd act: Back to business as usual: what was gained and what was lost?

1) Starker class based contradictions and contentions among different women in the public health sector

- some already better paid nurses did get a significant increase in their pay and others did not
- the pay differences between nurses grew -> class equality?



Tehy's campaign material in 2007: Hoitoalan palkat - Tahdon asia (Salaries in health sector - A matter of will)

2) Tehy's separate collective agreement with the municipal employer KT

- only partly achieved as an appendix and for a short time (2007-2013)

3) the political will in the conservative-right wing government to narrow the gender pay gap: failure -> no change

But: "Tehy's struggle did not abolish the pothole in nurses' wage development path but it might have had a significant role in slowing down the widening of gender pay gap"

4) Did show the collective will and potential power of nurses

- This kind of industrial action was a rare show of power from a female-dominated field of work in Finland

Corporatism as a gendered institution

The Rubber Band -metaphor

- women in the public sector have a deep feeling of wage injustice
 - the current labor market system which is based on consensus and the lowest common denominator holds out little hope for increases in pay in the female-dominated sectors
- there is not enough political will in the political leadership to target certain female-dominated professions with a big enough state subsidy to municipalities to actually raise women's salaries
- the government, in fact, cannot interfere in matters determined by the labor market organizations, especially in wage formation.
 - ” This was an exercise and it did not work. This was probably the last time that the government will ever meddle with wage issues”.
- “Rubber band” illustrates the temporary elasticity of gendered institutions
 - this elasticity helps them to resist change
 - Institutions can be stretched with the aim of reaching new better, more gender equal outcomes
 - but the institutions resist
 - and the rubber band returns to its original position
- “Rubber band” illustrates the stability of inequality
 - new policies : the equal pay allowance and a separate Tehy-agreement
 - their gains to women were lost when the institutions returned to their old positions

”The long shadow of Nancy the Nurse”

- “When we are now lamenting the loss of Finland’s competitive edge, we have to go back exactly to this industrial conflict. The biggest reason behind the loss of competitive edge is exactly the 2008-2009 union rounds. Tehy opened the game. There is no unanimity about the cost of Tehy’s settlement but it was expensive in any case.” Nancy the Nurse is constructed as the root cause of the lost competitive edge. She is the woman who asked for too much and led the country in the peril. Now she has lost everything, including the interest of the political parties that used to compete for her vote: ” Nancy the Nurse is most likely to be confused now ... She used to be competed for but now no one cares about her, at least if one looks at the political parties current profiles.”
(*Helsingin Sanomat* 19.10.2014)

“Where there is power, there is resistance.”
(Michel Foucault)

http://www.adressit.com/sairaanhoitajat_pois_palkkakuopasta



Nurses out of the wage pothole –campaign page in Facebook
(18.4.2016) Sign says: "Just a thank you is not enough".