



INTERREG IIIB NORTHERN PERIPHERY PROGRAMME • INTERREG IIIB NORTHERN PERIPHERY PROGRAMME

**MAIN PROJECT
FINAL PROJECT REPORT**

Project Name: PROFILE – Project for Female Leaders

Project Registration Number: 02/02/23

Measure: 2.2 Business innovation & development of human resources

Project Website: www.profilenet.org

For completion and submission to the Northern Periphery Programme Secretariat by:
31.07.2005



Executive Summary

The project's purpose was that through a created network of female leaders from companies, organisations and authorities in the area of the Northern Periphery and North West Russia strengthen female leaders in their work situation and make the skills of female leaders more visible. In this respect the project aimed to impact on following changes in the group of participants

- improved leadership skills adapted to international needs
- improved skills in interacting, communicative culture and cross-cultural understanding
- improved co-operation between authorities and companies using the contacts in the created network
- tools for business development and individual development

These skills aimed at fostering higher competence for individuals and the practical work in the project at business development between companies. In the continuation it should strengthen the regional development being the overall objective of the project. The participants came from Sweden, Finland, Faroe Islands and Russia. Project had also an observer from Scotland and an evaluator from Norway.

The activities were a mix of widely-used traditional methods, such as lectures in the trans-national and national seminars, moving on to the high level flexibility in the practical work in mini-projects including practice in two different countries. Every seminar was set up around a specific theme. The first seminar in Arkhangelsk had the theme "Internationalisation and cross cultural issues", seminar in Övertorneå dealt with "leadership", in Ylläs-seminar the participants worked with the questions of "networking" and the last seminar in Haparanda aimed at dissemination of the results. In addition there were organised national meetings according to the wishes of the participants: 3 meetings in Sweden, 4 in Finland, 7 in Faroe Islands and 3 in Russia. To learn and develop one self in people to people meetings gaining support from each other has been as important part of the pedagogical approach.

The mini-projects, mutual works in small international groups, played an important role in creation of concrete business between partners. The second purpose in including the work in mini-projects was the interaction and cross-cultural training. The subjects have been analysis, business co-operation between companies, proposals for new development projects and works for personal development. The practice offered an arena for wider understanding of living and work conditions in visited countries as well as new business contacts outside of the network of participants.

Both internal and external evaluation shows that the participants have obtained

- * new knowledge and experience gained in the seminars and in international people to people contacts
- * new leadership tools such as coaching-concept and individual leadership test with analysis and advice
- * Increased skills in international work by training in interaction, communicative culture and in cross-cultural issues both in theory and practice
- * new contacts for future business development: individual and business contacts - inside and outside of the network - on trans-national and national level

These gained skills have led to increased competence for participants, concrete business development, improved competitiveness for companies and lots of contacts for future co-operation. In addition, a great deal of concrete results was worked out.

- * Creation of a trans-national network and four national networks
- * Creation of 4 new work places as direct result of the project
- * Two books and one printed separate study
- * 11 mini-projects worked out by participants in international groups
- * Start of 2 new business co-operations
- * More than 680 persons has visited different seminars or other meetings

Project Information and Objectives

Background

For thousands of years there have been contacts within the arctic area of the Scandinavian countries and the Kola Peninsula. Despite that fact, today's co-operation is still, to a large extent, based on technology – environment – infrastructure – culture and on improving conditions for aboriginal inhabitants. Business contacts across-borders are not very lively and should, therefore, be supported and encouraged. This is particular important among female leaders because lots of them experience difficulties in entering the international arena. The research shows that women, in spite of their recognised higher social competence, are less active to work with contacts than men, particular in establishing new contacts. Network building is an important tool to develop, to create security and a market and to increase knowledge in different fields. For that reason a network consisting of leaders from small companies, big companies, organisations and authorities can serve as a launching pad to create technical, experienced and proficient prerequisites. It provides a large basis for learning from each other and for building up personal relations and trust, thereby creating a good basis for future co-operation, both nationally and trans-nationally. This is of crucial importance, since experience has continuously shown that successfully operating networks are not created between organisations, but between individuals. Therefore, the purpose of the project was to strengthen the female leaders in their work situation by offering new knowledge and training in international environment making them more competitive contributing to a society offering equal opportunities both for women and men.

Starting point

When we developed the project we had a good base to build on. The County Administrative Boards in Norrbotten and Västerbotten had granted funds for a feasibility study. This grant was aimed at the creation of the partnership and mutual development of the project. The goals were set jointly by Norwegian, Swedish and Finnish partners. The target group consisted of female leaders from companies, organisations and authorities. The final mix was 8 participants from Sweden, 8 from Finland, 8 from Russia and 2 from Faroe Islands. The participants were found by announcements in newspapers, information in organisations like Rotary, local networks of companies and other meetings. The final selection was made after individual interviews by project leaders.

Partners

The partnership was a new constellation consisting of partners who had not been working earlier together. The project owner and lead partner was Arctic Vocational Foundation (Stiftelsen Utbildning Nordkalotten) from Sweden, a vocational education centre owned by the Swedish, Finnish and Norwegian governments. The other partners were the Administration of Arkhangelsk, Faroe Islands Trade Council and Kemi-Tornio Polytechnic. Each partner country had a national project leader who was responsible for the activities in the respective state. Finnish and Swedish project leaders had 50 % of their working time, Faroe Islands 25 %. Swedish project leader was also co-project leader for Russia according to the rules of SIDA (Swedish International Development co-operation Agency) which financed the Russian participation. During the project the leaders had interesting interchanges with all partners, but at national level these project leaders played different roles, depending on the needs and wishes of the participants. The Faroe Islands was very successful at creating a national network and business contacts, Russian and Swedish participants' needs were concentrated to development of concrete business and Finnish national activities supported more individual development. Project leaders had meetings or telephone conferences every third month, in addition to the meeting in transnational seminars. The minutes of these meetings were important tools in bringing about continuous project development.

Purpose and objectives

The project purpose was, as mentioned in the summary, that through a created network of female leaders strengthen the participants in their work situation by improving their leadership qualities and contributing to the development of their organisations by practical work in international groups. This will, in continuation, strengthen the regional development being also the overall objective of the project. According to the objectives in the application the project will

- promote a new pattern of leadership that is better adapted to the international needs of today's business life by handling diversity and making better use of networks

- promote the supporting organisations to provide services that better meet the needs of female businesses with specific problems in the area
- create a collaborative and communicative culture as a basis for the development of good relationships and work forms for future co-operation
- develop tools for successful business development and networking in an area with long distances and sparse population

Project Implementation

Methods

The project was based on three keywords: leadership, internationalisation and networking. In addition has gender issues played a central role throughout all activities (see the separate heading). To learn and develop personally through people-to-people meetings, gaining support from each other has been an important part of the pedagogical approach. Dialogue, cooperation with other participants, possibilities to meet and realign our own perspectives in line with those of others has given important conditions for sustainable learning and understanding. The project activities were a mix of widely-used traditional methods, such as lectures in the trans-national and national seminars, moving on to the high level of flexibility in the practical work in mini-projects including practice in two different countries. We can call it our NETWORK MODEL FOR COMPETENCE IMPROVING. We tried to adopt a comprehensive approach to our project using a diversity of methods: trans-national seminars, study visits, practical work, project work and reports. In this way we encouraged the participants to work with the selected subjects from different perspectives. The major part of the project was based on the participants' own demands and interests in a "bottom up" approach which in brief encompasses: responsibility, reflection, activity, impact, flexibility and personal choices. In this respect we used two different methods in the structure: firm structure to make the project manageable and free structure in the participants' own activities, prioritising the participants' needs. These issues were particularly valid in national activities, mini-projects and practical work. The free structure was not provided only in the choice of activities but also in using the money most economically and by optimal way within a certain limit (2 000 EUR/participant), a matter, which is not usual in educational and supporting programmes. The concrete activities were divided in three main directions: education and training, mini-projects and practice in other countries.

Education and Training

In the frame of the project we organised 4 trans-national seminars with different themes:

A) The first seminar was organized in Arkhangelsk, Russia in November 2003 and had the theme "Internationalisation and cross cultural issues". Our speaker, internationalisation consultant Anette Engström from Industrins Internationaliserings Center AB, was one of the absolutely best and most experienced experts in the topic. There were not only lectures, there were discussions, group projects, case studies and a simulation game. It was real training in cross-cultural issues. Anette described her objectives for this two-day seminar: "The purpose is to increase awareness of cultures concerned, to create a better understanding and more empathy concerning values, norms and strengths. In that way the participants will see new ways and solutions to challenges to be faced in the future. This will, in return, result in high efficiency and less friction in the work to come." This was exactly what we needed for successful continuation. On the first day we talked more generally about cultures, frames of reference, and cultural stress and we ended the day with a cross-cultural simulation game. The second day was spent on the work with "country specialities" on the themes such as different cultures' management style, way of working, communication and the time concept. There were lots of interesting discussions, laughs and serious insights. The seminar was a good launching pad for our future international work.

B) The theme of the next seminar in Övertorneå, Sweden was "Leadership". The programme started with a talk and analysis of leadership qualities by Kerstin Eiserman from Persona, specialist in Management and Leadership. She had previously received questionnaires from each participant filled out for analysis, and after her talk she spent one hour per person analysing the outcome, face to face according to the Aspect method. The Aspect analysis aims to evaluate individuals' strengths and weaknesses in order to assess their capacity for development and judgement.

Charlotte Holgerzon, researcher at the Stockholm School of Economics, talked about her thesis "recruitment of top executives". The speech elaborated more or less hidden discriminatory practices affecting women's changes of employment at management level. She emphasised tokenism as a self-perpetuating system. System phenomena require system level intervention. The situation rather than the person need to be addressed, because discrimination is built into the structure. Her speech was very enlightening and probably encouraged the participants to be braver in pointing out unfair practices in their own organisation.

Our lecture in coaching was Domenico La Corte from the Consulting Company Kwaiet AB. Most of the Saturday was spent with a coaching workshop. Many exercises were undertaken in different constellations to make sure that the participants clearly understood and could carry out coaching. Coaching, from a line manager's perspective, is the ability to make employees grow in their role. When dealing with staff, line managers need to be clear over how and when to act as a manager, a leader and a coach. This is a useful tool in daily work as managers.

C) The third trans-national seminar was held in the beautiful surroundings of Ylläs Fell in Finland over the theme "Networking". Petri Sipilä from Verkostokonsultit gave a theoretical background for creation of a network: what is networking in reality, construction of a network, understanding difficulties of networking and building up a network step by step. This lecture gave new understanding for Profile participants of networking in practice.

Tuulikki Laine-Kangas from the Employment and Economic Development Centre in Finland presented the tasks of centres and particularly their role in supporting women. The presentation included also examples of two Finnish projects in networking. An interesting point item was a survey carried out in one of the projects concerning the Finnish women entrepreneurs' needs to support services: **networks presented the most important part with at 40 %**, training was seen as the second most important with at 34 % following with by advisory services 15 % and financial support 11 %. Besides lectures, the seminar included a workHaparanda/Tornio, so called Eurocity. Eero Pekkarinen from Kemi-Tornio Polytechnic introduced an interesting method for planning, GOPP (Goal Oriented Project Planning) to participants using this method as a tool in preliminary planning for continuation of the Profile network.

D) The aim of the last seminar, located in Eurocity, was dissemination of the results and meetings with different European networks. The seminar was attended by 80 invited guests, among those 8 representatives from different women organisations from places such as London, Reykjavik, ST Petersburg, Stockholm, Helsinki, Copenhagen and Italy. The principal speaker was Carita Peltonen of the Nordic Council of Ministers. She pointed out that advancement of gender issues, e.g. work-life balance, will only take place if also men are included. She emphasized the violence against women and concluded that what is needed now is for society to turn against this violence just as it did in 1950 against the beating of children. The representatives of invited European organisations made presentations, not only of their activities, but also of good examples, "best practice", as a result of networking from their own countries. Leena Heiskala from Women's Agency of Finland concluded talking about the importance of interlinking networks. "We need different networks for successful international co-operation".

In the frame of the project there were organized national seminars or study visits corresponding to the wishes and needs on national level. Sweden organised 3 seminars, Finland 4 seminars, Faroe Islands 7 seminars and Russia 3 seminars. Particularly we should mention Faroe Islands' and Russian's excellent work for a larger groups in the frame of the national seminars.

Mini-projects

In the frame of the project there were carried out mutual mini-projects in smaller international groups playing a significant role both in development of business activities as well as training in collaborative and communicative culture in the international environment. Most of the mini-projects started slowly and the time for real active work remained relative short. It was understandable because the task required, not only to carry out a ready project, but also innovative part in creation of the project plan, some times also finding a project idea and partners in a group that you never met before. It also turned out that participants' interest and ambitions were higher than expected and took more time than anybody understood from the beginning. On the other hand it gave the project better result. The subjects varied quite much from small co-operation activities to large analysis and serious business. Some par-

participants concentrated also to create contacts for future activities or individual development using the network's competence. In spite of the little bit dull start 18 project ideas were presented, 16 started and 13 of those were carried out.

Practice

The practice offered an arena for wider understanding of living and work conditions in visited countries as well as deepened contacts between participants and new business contacts outside of the network. Some of the trips were carried out in small groups the other ones were more individual, connected to the mini-projects. Please, find more detailed information both of the mini-projects and practice in our printed Final report and on our web site www.profilenet.org.

Evaluation of the implementation

The project had good chances of succeeding already in the beginning. We can find following factors for success

- One of the most important points was the careful preparation concerning both interest among companies/organisations and building of the partnership. This was funded by County Administrative Board of Norrbotten and County Administrative Board of Västerbotten.
- Experienced and strong partner organisations
- High level professional human resources acting in the project, both representatives of the partner organisations and subcontracted consultants
- Strong and engaged steering group
- Mixed participation: companies, organisations (banks, educational institutes) and authorities
- Selection of "right" participants. The companies were not too small so all of them had both economical and personnel resources as well as interest for international contacts. On the other hand they were not too big so they did not have any needs about the "help on the way".

Some weaknesses were also found in implementation.

- We found very soon interest in different countries among partners and presumptive participants but national financing and different rules for this stopped the participation of several countries. That made preparation work difficult and took lots of time. One of the reasons was long waiting of decisions from the different financiers from so many countries as the programme requires for good partnership. Because our project aimed at network building in the Northern Periphery area, the lack of full participation of several countries is counted as a weakness in the project.
- To enter Russia which worked as the equal partner is not allowed without special permission. You need also a very important reason to make it. This matter makes working with Russian partners and participants very difficult and our definitive experience is that the programme should not encourage Russian participation keeping these conditions.

Although the lack of several countries was a weakness we appreciated the opportunity to involve them on specific tasks as observer, evaluator and lectures making the project more purposeful for the whole area concerned. The project gave also good opportunity to use the our own large personal networks which all involved persons offered as soon it was necessary.

We did not see any threats during the project time mostly thanks to experienced partners and good preparation, not only in the preparatory phase, but also in the meetings for planning with the partners, steering group and participants. The other tools which contributed to eliminate any threats were

- external evaluation which intended to give inputs for adjustments during the project period delivering reports summing up the views of the participants on the running activities and having regular contact with the project leader.
- follow up and help by the engaged steering group
- regular meetings by project leaders

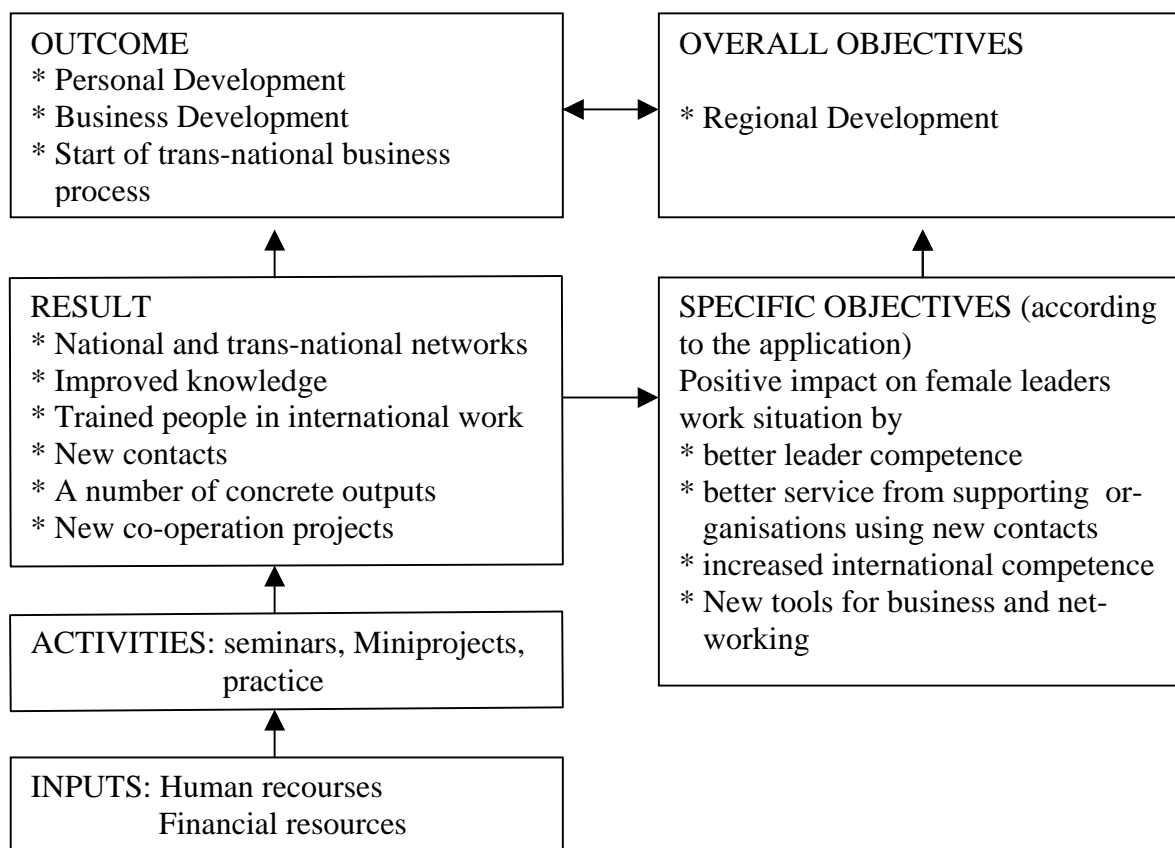
Value of the outputs to the cost of the project

The project aimed mainly at the creation of a network and improving of the international competence and experience of the participants making their skills more competitive and visible. Future benefit of the network and competence improving is difficult to estimate in money today. The aim of the mini-projects and practice was first of all training in international co-operation and creation of the launching pad for

future business development. The business contacts and started co-operation of concrete business activities, which are possible to measure in crones or EUR are only in the beginning and has not created much value during the project time. At the same time we want to point out that the economical result of those projects which were started will be visible in the future. But – if we sum up the value of the created business co-operations and started new projects, which hopefully all of them will be realized as planned and started, the value will be several times more than the total cost of this project.

Project Results

The scheme over the results corresponding to the objectives



Both internal and external evaluation shows that participants have obtained

- * new knowledge and experience gained in the seminars and in international people to people meetings
- * new leadership tools like coaching-concept, networking concept and individual leadership test with analysis and advice
- * Increased skills in international work by training in communicative and collaborative culture and in cross- cultural issues both in theory and practice
- * New contacts for future business development: individual and business contacts - inside and outside of the network - on trans-national and national level

In addition the project resulted in following concrete outputs

- * Creation of a trans-national network and four national networks
- * Creation of 4 new work places as direct result of the project
- * Two books and one printed separate study
- * 11 mini-projects (business development or exploratory works) are worked out by participants in the international groups
- * Start of 2 new business co-operations
- * More than 680 persons has visited different seminars or other meetings

These gained skills have led to increased competence for participants, concrete business development for companies and improved competitiveness leading to the regional development. The fact, that members of the steering group were mostly representatives of authorities as well as some of the participants, has created both better understanding and valuable future contacts. Because the project was initiated and carried out by women, it has made female leaders' skills and knowledge more visible contributing to more equal society and by this way supporting regional development.

The project had very big ambitions from the beginning and required much more time than expected. Therefore, the coaching of new members was not made to the extent that the project plan presented. One of the reasons was the high engagement of the participants in mini-projects and number of the mini-projects run essentially over the expectation. Nevertheless, new members were involved by informal way, mostly in connection to the practice and mini-projects but we did not reach the number 50 as it was expected in the application. We have not achieved other results than those in the application.

As we earlier mentioned the project offered new management tools: coaching and personal management test. Our ambition was also to use an IT-platform which provided a useful arena for information and group work. Unfortunately the participants never found time to learn it, they preferred using of the e-mail which everybody managed and which functioned to satisfaction. However, we found that **the network itself was a the most powerful tool**. It inspired, it supported, it gave advice, it found partners and it created lots of concrete results.

Talking about Best Practice we want to call attention to the concept of the project which we call our Network Model for Competence Improving. It was a good mix of education, serious practical work and gaining of new experience inspiring the participants to take responsibility and work many times more than required. The other contribution to success was the mix of participants. We found that the concept of Trippel Helix really functioned. The group found use of all competences and appreciated the professional mix of the participants.

The partner organisations have expressed that the project gave them a great deal of new knowledge, preferable in leadership and equality. It gave also new contacts, Russia and Faroe Islands. Implementation of the project in partner organisations was done by usual way, e.g. Arctic Vocational Foundation had continuous information for all personnel and the Board. The project was places on the web site of each organisation and Regional Administrations of Norrbotten and Västerbotten had information on their official web site.

Transnationality

As we mentioned earlier, every partner organisation had a national project leader and Sweden had the role of the lead partner. This was important because the group of participants, total 26 people, came from all participating countries and the activities consisted of mutual work across the borders. The members of the steering group consisted of two representatives from each country except Russia which had only one. This ensured the trans-nationality as well as the matter that the countries from the programme area, which did not participate, were involved by the specific tasks.

The participants considered that most benefit of the project was just the trans-nationality. The project encouraged the participants to see other possibilities than earlier using the "international eyes". This was an important added value which we understood clear only in the process. It gave participants the unique possibility and help for trans-national development which they had not been able to carry out without the project. The project was important also for the partner organisations in finding new partners for the future. Some new projects are also started in co-operation with the partners from this project.

Lesson learned

Trans-national projects are often complex, it is a question of leadership, roles and conditions in a diverse environment. For that reason we chose to carry out an ongoing evaluation which continuously monitored the project and gave a basis for and provided advice for development during the whole project duration.

We have learned how important it is to clarify the conception in the trans-national work. The goals must be very clear, much more so than in national projects, because the possibilities for meetings are few. Some more very important aspects to discuss in the planning stage are the role of every country and

partner's responsibilities for the activities. The discussions during the meetings very easy end up addressing solely the practical arrangements. We concluded that we should have decided to reserve more time for discussing our own group, project leaders, and the mutual work just as leaders.

A usual problem, which the project leaders were very soon confronted with, was how we can keep each other informed and updated. The project leaders acted on different arenas, so it was important to get information from those arenas passed on to all the national leaders, and through them all participants. Our experience is that it is necessary to find a cooperation model for information from the very outset and to maintain it, a matter which often is forgotten through lack of time.

Trans-national projects make high demands on project leaders' skills to create contacts and on their ability to adapt the special frameworks where trans-national work is done. On the other hand participating in trans-national projects offers good training in these skills. If you want to work in trans-national projects you have to be open to new ideas, contacts, cultures and working methods and you need a large portion of patience.

Dissemination and Transfer of Experience

Because all of the partner organisations were experienced in the project work the most benefit of the project for them was that opening doors for new areas of the co-operation and new partners. It has also deepened the organisations' role as a locomotive in the regional development. Therefore it has been important to create effective system for information, benefiting both partner organisations and the target group and their organisations. The project was provided an own logo which was used in all information and internal papers. It was given an image consisting of three keywords: leadership, internationalisation and networking. The target group for dissemination and transfer of experience were the partner organisations (internal information), selected authorities (particularly the authorities in the steering group), other organisations working in EU-projects, public information in press, supporting organisations such as banks, Chambers, Associations of companies and different women organisations. Dissemination channels has been Home page of the project, articles about the project and participants, information of the project's results and products in participants' companies, a printed Final report which is sent to the mentioned target group for dissemination. Dissemination is carried out on local level, regional level and country level.

1. Local level: internal information, information in local organisations as Rotary, local Associations of companies, local women organisations, local newspapers
2. Regional level: regional press, regional organisations, municipalities in the region, organisations working in EU-project, regional authorities
3. Country and global level: All partners have used the same dissemination model giving information in all participating countries. The Dissemination seminar in Eurocity inviting representatives from different European women organisations, acting both on national and worldwide level, offered good information of the project. They have also provided examples of the printed Final Report for dissemination in their organisations.

Gender perspective

In our trans-national work gender issues have played a central role throughout all our activities. That does it mean in reality? In "A Guide to gender impact assessment", European Commission Unit V/D.5 1997, page 5 we can read: "Not restricting efforts to promote equality to the implementation of specific measures, but mobilising all general policies and measures specifically for the purpose of achieving equality. The participants were women, the goals were set to support women, the project was started entirely by women and implementation was carried out by women. Although the concrete activities have been of a general character, the gender aspect has always been taken into account. But mainstreaming does not mean merely adding female issues to the agenda. It implies a change of the agenda to meet the needs of both women and men. Therefore, during the whole process, the project has also involved men in the steering group, as lectures, business partners, in practice...."

Conclusions

In general we can say that the project corresponded to clear needs making the realisation to success. The results, both commercial and non-commercial, were useful both for the participants individually and

the companies/organisations as well as for partner organisations. The seminars were considered to be on very high level and useful for participants. Mini-projects and practice gave cross-cultural understanding and training in working on international level. Not only participants expressed the satisfaction but also their companies allowing their employees to take part in all the activities paying the salary all the time. Only seminars and practice required 22-25 working days and some of the mini-projects were really time-consuming. We knew already from the beginning that building up functioning trans-national relations takes a long time. This understanding is particularly important if the participants come from different cultures and different businesses like in our project. Both leaders and participants felt that time was too short and hopes of a continuation were in everyone's mind. Let the words of our Scottish observer, Helena Harcourt, and our evaluators from Finnut AS, Norway, form the last conclusions.

"The evaluator concluded in the evaluation report, that the Profile project has been a successful response to a clearly felt wish among female leaders in the Northern Periphery area to get a wider network internationally as well as nationally in order to discuss management issues and business cooperation. The responses from the participants indicate that the themes of the lectures have been regarded as very relevant and useful for all the participants. Through seminars, cultural programs, visits in companies in Russia, Sweden and Finland, the participants have gained valuable insight in conditions and business culture in other countries. It was also stated in the evaluation report that the project has on the whole been well organised and coordinated considering the fact that it is a project with almost 30 participants from 4 countries with different languages, and from an area with huge distance. The wide range of activities seems, from the evaluator's point of view, to have been organised with acceptable respect of schedules and progress goals". Trude Riksdag och Ole Henrik Brinchmann-Hansen, Finnut Consult AS, Vadsö, Norway.

"The Profile project has proved to more than fulfil its ambitions; it built networks of fantastic, intelligent and powerful women; it provided innovative and useful training; it carried out interesting and fruitful mini-projects. Above all the most important achievement, that a communality, a sympathy, a recognition and understanding, was discovered between these multifaceted high-achieving women from so many cultures, from different businesses and belonging to such a vast array of countries as from the Faroe Islands to North West Russia." Helena Harcourt, UHI, Millennium Institute, Inverness, Scotland.

Övertorneå 30.06.2005

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