

## **Successful Workshop at Gender Conference: *Understanding the Mechanisms of the Leaky Pipeline***

KANN, the Network of Nordic University Women, ran a workshop during the *6th European Conference on Gender Equality in Higher Education*, held at the University of Stockholm 4-6 August 2009. The theme was “*Understanding the Mechanisms of the Leaky Pipeline*” - a metaphor for the question of why women disappear from PhD and Post-doctoral programmes as well as employment as researchers at universities and colleges in much higher degree than men. Women are also underrepresented in the higher levels’ of the commercial sector. The paradox is that the number of female students in universities and colleges is steadily increasing, as is the number of females completing their studies and taking exams. Why is the pipe leaking? Where do the women go?

Dr Liisa Husu from the Hanken School of Economics in Helsinki, Finland was the first speaker. She is one of the most prominent researchers in Europe in the field of Gender and Higher Education. She presented a long list of factors that drive away women from universities as well as higher positions in other sectors. Just a few examples: hidden discrimination, lack of encouragement, lack of visibility, difficulties in receiving research grants etc. Other factors are male gate-keepers and a masculine power structure. These factors together oppress women and prevent them from making careers. Change is very slow and it will take years before women are equal in the academic world.

The second speaker was Dr Steven Sampson from the Department of Social Anthropology at the University of Lund, Sweden. Dr Sampson is originally American. He has recently been one of the partners of a European project which dealt with the Leaky pipe problem. Even though he agreed with Dr Husu’s description of the present situation, his analysis of why women disappear from the universities differed from hers in several aspects. First of all he wanted to reformulate the question to: What kind of people remain at the universities? During the last 15-20 years universities have become part of a new management culture which includes a different steering process which diminishes peoples’ ability to develop and increase their knowledge.

Sampson also said that university employees have become exposed to an “audit culture”, where transparency, quantification, evaluation, competition, and an “excellence ideology” are the steering criteria. Everything is to be weighed and measured, which does not strengthen creativity and development. Perhaps women are critical of this new way and that is why they leave. Both men and women are suffering under the change of paradigm.

A lively debate followed the two speeches. The workshop attracted a large audience, with more than 60 persons filling a room estimated for 50.

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