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**To be a place with boys and men, a good place to work: Constructions of the gendered ECEC organization.** Presentation on the 26th EECERA Annual Conference, 2.9.2016, Dublin, Ireland.

### **Abstract**

The paper explores a new recruitment initiative for men in ECEC-organizations, "Play Resource". Here, young boys from secondary schools experience work in ECEC before their choice of career is made (Lauritzen 2015). It addresses questions of the participants problems- understanding of gender balance, recruitment of men and relates this to the further development and improvement of the initiative.

The paper relates to previous research on recruiting men to work in ECECs (C.f Opheim, Waagene, Salvanes, Gjerustad & Holen, 2014). It frames the problem of recruitment within governance discussions on "wicked problems" which are social tasks too complex in nature for one government unit to solve alone (Busch 2013, Sørensen 2014). Innovation, particularly driven by collaboration and partnerships is regarded a means to address them (Sørensen 2014, Bjørge, Sandvin and Hutchinson 2015).

The paper applies a bottom-up and social praxis-perspective on innovation in public sector welfare services, sensitive to conflict of (professional)values and differing understandings constructed in the social setting (Wegener 2012, 2015).

Research questions are addressed by using qualitative methodology: observations in 4 ECECs and in –depth interviews with key informants: ECEC managers, headmasters, participating boys. The project complies with ethical norms set for research in Norway by NSD - Norwegian Centre for Research Data.

Preliminary analysis suggest that participants understands Play Resource as a tool to achieve different means, not merely more gender balance in ECECs and this might affect the development work. Results might informe recruitment practices and organizational innovation processes in ECECs.


### **Keywords**

Recruitment of men, Gender balance, Innovation in ECEC, Wicked problems, Qualitative methods

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## To be a place with boys and men, a good place to work: Constructions of the gendered ECEC organization

Birgitte Ljunggren and Kari Emilsen  
paper to the 2016 EECERA conference  
Dublin 30.8-3.9 2016  
D/ 20 : 11-12.30  
GENDER AND INNOVATION IN ECEC: BRINGING BOYS AND MEN IN  
Self-organised Symposium  
Room HG08, School of Nursing




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## Introduction

- Initial confession
- The frame of the paper is still the same:
  - An organization perspective
  - The wondering about the ECEC as a feminized work place:
    - Well known statistics: 8,6 % men
    - ECEC-history in Norway as a home away from home
  - The Play Resource project as an innovation project
    - Exploring the interface between ECEC as an organization, innovation and gender (recruitment of men)



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## New research question

- Which constructions of the man/boy-friendly ECEC organization is found in the material?
  - Do we find relationships between gendered understandings of the man/boy-friendly ECEC organization and innovation?

– **Caution: very premature analysis!**




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## Theory

- Acker (1990, 2006): the gendered organization
  - “ To say that an organization is gendered means that advantage and disadvantage, exploitation and control, action and emotion, meaning and identity, are patterned through and in terms of a distinction between male and female, masculine and feminine. Gender is not an addition to ongoing processes, conceived as gender neutral. Rather it is and integral part of those processes, which cannot be properly understood without an analysis of gender” Acker 1990: 146




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- The universal worker:
  - “The concept of a universal worker excludes and marginalizes women who cannot, almost by definition, achieve the qualities of a real worker, because to do so is to become like a man” (Acker 1990: 150)





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## Theory (analysis?)

- ECEC as a gendered organization in Norway:
  - Reflected in the government brochure on how to recruit and keep men in ECEC in Norway (Friis 2006)
    - “the housewife culture”: a home away from home
    - “ a women`s culture”
    - Lack of professionalism
    - The booklet questions this culture as not male friendly and therefore a problem for recruiting and keeping male employees




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## The booklet...

- “And how will men feel comfortable working in a work environment resembling a home? Few men like to be associated with a homely atmosphere at work and even less a house wife culture? In most homes the women still prevail and are literally deciding where the cupboard shall stand [in english : wear the pants].” (Friis 2006)
- In other words: male friendly is “public-spherish”, professional and something to do with challenging feminized power structures




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## Theoretically operationalized question

- What elements are described by the informants as vital to gender the ECEC organization more “masculine”?
- What elements are constructed as important problems with the ECEC organization as “male –hostile”?




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## Qualitative approach

- In- depth interviews with male (female) managers and employees and boys participating in in the Play Resource Project (+ 2 additional interviews)
  - The analysis is based upon preliminary analysis of in-depth interviews with 2 male managers, 1 male assistant and 2 boys ( 5 informants)
- *Left to analyze:* Interview data from 4 ECECs in the project: 4 managers, participating boys.




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## Preliminary findings: the “cosy” organization

- Problematizing sector and organizational cosiness
- « I feel like using the word cosy. I felt it was a kind of cosy culture. [...] I would rather it to be a confident [trygg] atmosphere in the ECEC than a cosy one. The cosy culture I link to the home culture and the privatized way of running a ECEC.»




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## “Cosiness” and housewifery connects to particular pedagogical practices

- Privatized practices and non-skilled work force as the core of non-professionalism:
  - “mothering” at work: make sandwiches and clean tables
  - engaging children in calm activities: beads
  - Find itself in the material in some kind of contrast to another type of ECEC, a new one




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## Old and new

- [in the old culture] Then it was house wives who were employed. If you could wipe off the tables and make sandwiches that was sufficient. But now [ECECs] are the exact very opposite of this. They are supposed to be sterile buildings....the buildings are built to facilitate activity and learning, to challenge oneself, the contrast to home. At home it is often a bit sedentary, quiet, safe. The ECEC shall be something else. Of course it shall be safe! [manager 1]



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## Some tentative organizational opposites constructed from data

	The "cosy" ECEC	The professional ECEC
Problem-solving	Static (talking)	Dynamic (doing)
Organizing units	Static (settle down,)	Flexible (unit rotation)
Organizing in general	Under-organized, small scale	Organized, larger scale
Power structure	Unformal (tacit knowledge), non-hierarchy (Decision by show of hands, friendship)	More visible hierarchy based on formal competence, decisions based on professional reflection
Management	Employee-focused, "do-gooders", habit-driven	Child-focused, flexible (expose employees to discomfort)
Technology	Technology refusal	Technology integration, efficiency
Workcontent	Sedentary, indoor (beads in particular))	Outdoor play, activity (sports)
Workforce	Female majority, narrow field of recruitment (pedagogy)	Gender balanced, broad field of recruitment (carpenters, physiotherapy)
Work-family relationship	Flexible, fixed work hours (part time)	?
Organization development, business development and innovation	Not relevant, focus on care and well-being	Energetic, doing business is ok, challenging old patterns, innovative, strategic

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## The cosy organization and recruitment of men

- Having a lot of boys here at our ECEC, only a handful will actually work there. But they get insights in that this is not a housewife-occupation where one might not thrive, but that it is a place with boys and men, a good workplace. [manager 1]

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## Still prevailing?

- The ECEC is in many ways based on a women-home-care-culture, that is not something that first and foremost appeals to men. And one does not necessary feel included in such a discourse or culture [as a man]. [manager 2]



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## Discussion

- The cosy organization is strongly linked to femininity and the private and non-professional organization: it is gendered female
- In the material a new and professional organization is presented/constructed for us by the informants:
  - Defined as the contrast to the cosy organization
  - Understood as male-friendly
  - Does it represent a new underlying logic and normal model worker?
    - Is it gendered male? Androgynous?
    - Reproduce male hegemonic norm in ECEC-organization?
    - Expresses a norm consciousness? Critique?

What effect of these constructs can be discussed in terms of gendered opportunities and gendering of the ECEC organization?



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