



Europe Region

World Association
of Girl Guides
and Girl Scouts

Association mondiale
des Guides et des
Eclaireuses

Asociación
Mundial de las
Guías Scouts

Gender and Leadership in Girl Guiding and Girl Scouting

International Participatory
Action Research in the
Netherlands and Scotland

Summary



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Summary

Why gender and leadership?

WAGGGS has a mission to improve the lives of girls and young women, and gender equality is a shared value in our Member Organizations. Girlguiding Scotland (part of Girlguiding UK), working in a single sex setting, and Scouting Nederland, working in a co-educational setting, wanted to assess how their young members perceived gender norms, and whether girls and young women felt they had equal opportunities to pursue leadership roles both within and outside of the movement.

What were the key findings?

- ▶ Young people involved in WAGGGS activities show less gender bias than young people in other contexts.
- ▶ However, some young members still bring with them from wider media and culture certain attitudes and beliefs about women's leadership potential. This may create barriers to girls' leadership confidence within girl guiding and girl scouting that targeted activities can address.
- ▶ Participation in this project expanded the view of leadership among both girls and boys, and helped young members to recognize more examples of female leaders in the wider world.
- ▶ Some young people involved in these activities have experience of leadership that they do not recognize as valuable. Tailored activities can help them recognize and develop these skills further.
- ▶ Girls can need dedicated space to develop leadership confidence and structures to develop specific behaviours. It can help to allocate leadership roles to those less keen to put themselves forward.
- ▶ Girls don't easily 'see' the leadership skills they are gaining at the time. Leaders became much more conscious of the need to focus on providing all girls with a chance to try being a leader in a small group.
- ▶ Girls don't have enough visible 'famous' female role models in society and had a tendency to confuse being a celebrity with being a role model.
- ▶ A single sex setting was easier for girls to try out being a leader and yet many girls still needed 'a gentle push'.
- ▶ Leaders enjoyed the project- the focus made them think more about the subject and their own approach and experiences; they found the timescale challenging but at the same time they were glad it had a known start and finish date when they joined up. They enjoyed the international dimension.
- ▶ The researcher was impressed by the high degree of engagement of all involved with the project- high rate of return for questionnaires and that everyone stayed engaged with the project to the end.

What is Participatory Action Research?

PAR is a collaborative approach to research that emphasizes the engagement of the participants to make active changes during the process. Rather than inviting a researcher to observe and analyse us, the PAR method invites project members to get involved in shaping the investigation and to try out different ways of improving the situation. Participants gain in understanding and experience while the process is actually happening, as opposed to learning only from reading someone else's opinions and analysis after it is over.

How did the process work?

The aim was to create a project that would raise awareness of diverse local contexts and needs, suggest improvements to the leadership development opportunities girl guiding and girl scouting can provide so as to boost recruitment and retention, and build the confidence of the young members involved along the way.

A steering group was formed of national level staff and volunteers from each of the two organizations along with one ERW committee member, and supported by an ERW staff member. 9 local leaders running 9 groups in Scotland, and 9 local leaders running 5 groups in the Netherlands, joined the project. The research was led by an academic from the UK who specializes in youth culture and gender.

The research period was around six months and began with a meeting of all local leaders and the steering group, to be trained by the academic researcher in key gender concepts and research tools. The local leaders and all the young members were sent questionnaires, set by the researcher, to complete at the very beginning and repeat at the very end of the project, to map if and how their feelings and ideas had changed.

In the **“first audit”** local leaders undertook an initial investigation activity with their own members such as a discussion or observation. From this they identified key issues specific to their local contexts. Each country group met to reflect together on what this first audit activity had revealed about their young members' thinking, and to build new activities to challenge them. Each leader carried out these activities with their own groups.



The **“second audit”** saw the leaders repeating their use of the initial research tools to see whether their new activities had changed the attitudes of their young members about the links between gender and leadership. The leaders then all came together with the steering group in a second international meeting to present and discuss their findings. The researcher then produced a written report



What will Girlguiding Scotland and Scouting Nederland change as a result?

GIRL GUIDING SCOTLAND

- We will launch a leadership campaign in 2016 which recognises and celebrates inspiring and successful women
- We will be implementing learning in leaderships training for young members
- We will be sharing the results within the youthwork policy research forum in Scotland

SCOUTING NEDERLAND

- We will give more attention to leadership and different leadership styles, by incorporating it into training for our leaders and the activities of our national teams
- We will provide more ideas for activities around leadership to leaders
- In our recruitment texts we will be more aware of communicating in terms of leadership styles instead of gender and be more aware of gender equality overall

What are the recommendations to other MOs?

- PAR can be a really useful way of engaging members of your MO in reflecting on their practice to improve their ways of working. After some initial training on the methods, you do not necessarily need to involve an external academic all the way through.
- There is nonetheless value in inviting an external observer in: this project showed the benefit of an external viewpoint, someone who could ask new questions that we had not yet tried. As an academic, the researcher had additional capacity to do “desk research” to supplement the active research, which we might not have had capacity to do.
- Some local leaders were initially concerned that it was going to be a lot of work, and were pleasantly surprised at how easily the research fitted into their usual meetings with their groups.
- This kind of project is a great development opportunity for local leaders who are not involved in national leadership to meet leaders from another country.
- It was also a chance for local leaders to connect within their own country, and they gave positive feedback about the benefits to their development that this offered. This kind of research does not have to be undertaken internationally: it could be used to investigate different conditions in contrasting areas of one country, such as urban/rural.
- Local leaders responded positively to a shorter timespan for this research – it felt doable
- Good working relationships are absolutely key: overcoming any translation problems, and making sure that you meet in person regularly.

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For further information, please contact:

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