

CES Travel Grant: Narrative Report

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The following narrative report intends to summarize my activities and findings in Stockholm during a research trip conducted under the support of a Travel Grant from the Centre for European Studies at Carleton University.

From July 1, 2018 to July 12, 2018, I travelled to Stockholm, Sweden to further my graduate research project titled “The Impacts of the Cash-For-Care Policy in Sweden: an Intersectional Approach.” During my stay I conducted informational interviews, consulted the Government of Sweden’s National Archive collection, used resources from the University of Stockholm Library, and used my ethnographic sensibility training to gain a deeper understand of Swedish culture. Combined, these activities enabled me to further understand the complexities around the Cash-For-Care Policy in Sweden, but also the cultural context in which this childcare policy was created and further dissolved.

The main research activity I planned was to conduct informational interviews with NGO representatives whose work relates to gender policy and women’s participation in the workforce. After receiving Ethics approval from Carleton University, I contacted organizations with direct involvement with childcare policy or subsidiary interest in gender equality in government, the workforce, and society. Specifically, I attempted to identify Swedish groups with links and research interests associated with the European Union. These NGOs included the Swedish Women’s Union, the Swedish Women’s European Network, and the Swedish Gender Equality Agency, among others. On the governmental end, I was only able to generally identify the Ministry of Health and Social Affairs and send an interview request to their general inbox instead of targeting specific individuals to be interviewed.

Due to late Ethics approval and the timing of my research trip, I was not able to arrange any formal interviews with my target group in Stockholm during my stay. The general feedback I received was that people were away on vacation (many Swedish workers take leave from July to August) or I failed to receive a response. After consulting with my project supervisor, I intend to address this setback by conducting Skype interviews from Canada instead. My target months for arranging these interviews were between September and October when workers will be back in the office and able to dedicate time to answer my questions. However, after securing a co-op position during the fall semester, I was unable to move forward with these interviews due to scheduling conflicts with the time zone difference. My supervisor and I have decided to reevaluate interviewing strategies for the winter and spring 2019 semester.

Given my inability to conduct formal interviews with my target audience, I instead turned to other ways to cultivate knowledge during my stay. Specifically, I turned to informal interviews with the general population. While not intended for use in my formal graduate research submission, the purpose of these interviews was to A) gage how familiar Swedish citizens are with the Cash-for-Care policy and B) hear their views on

this specific policy as well as publicly subsidized childcare and/or gender equality issues more generally. I found the Cash-for-Care policy and its abolition in 2016 was not well known, indicating the policy is not a widely discussed subject. Two explanations for this include: the Cash-for-Care policy was not considered a lucrative or innovative policy, perhaps due to the already widespread policies addressing gender equality in Sweden; or, more likely, the young demographic I spoke to likely do not have newborns themselves or amongst their social circles and therefore would have no interest in a childcare policy.

Overall, while I was unable to conduct the formal interviews I had prepared for, the trip was beneficial for my understanding of Swedish gender culture more generally. From men pushing strollers around the city to young children hardly wearing the prescribed colours of pink and blue, there was a noticeable difference in how the Swedish people approach child rearing. This reaffirmed the notion that a one policy cannot singlehandedly change the cultural context of a society. The interview responses I did receive from Swedish groups indicate there is an interest in my research subject and the intersectionality element I intend to consider. I look forward to continuing this research upon returning to Carleton University in Canada.