

## Country report The Netherlands- EU FGC Network meeting November 2014 - Varese Italy

By the end of 2014 the 10.000<sup>th</sup> Eigen Kracht-conferentie (EK-c) will be facilitated. EK-c is the Dutch name of FGC, meaning one's own strength or power. This number seems a lot and is also much regarding conference experience. But it is not that many compared to all the situations (cases) where still a decision was made in the life of citizens by 'strangers'.

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Important lessons learned from this extensive conference experience are:

- FGC is all about *how* the circle around citizens can be *widened* and *addressed* with regards to their joint capacity to use their common 'social capital' and as first, make a plan. FGC is about citizen's rights to stay in control over their lives. FGC is not about the kind of problems yes or no, or about people who can or cannot.
- Independence of the FGC facilitation process is key and reflected by an independent FGC organization and independent community coordinators: no interest in the outcome- and no interference with the content of the plan. A professional, leading and participating a decision making process easily gets into a split position. Whether or not s-he use their power, it threatens confidence in the fairness of the decision making process. In this way families are enabled to keep control and direction over their lives.
- It is fairly easy to recruit ordinary citizens for the role of independent community coordinator. To date in NL we have over 800 community coordinators coming from various different cultural and ethnic background, speaking together over 100 languages. They facilitate one to max four conferences a year, so it doesn't become a profession. Families can choose if they wish a coordinator fit to their language and cultural background. Ordinary citizens looking behind the scenes of helping organizations, is only healthy.
- Research: all conferences are part of a registration system that provides information and enables research. All Dutch studies shows that EK-c's are effective even in complex situations such as in domestic violence or so-called multi-problem families. The costs are relatively low, citizens (clients) happy and the quality of the plan that families make are good according to both families and professionals. The majority of the plan is executed, and leads to increases help from the network, to solving problems and to prevent escalation.

### *From Welfare to Participation State*

At the opening of the Dutch parliamentary year 2013-14, King Willem-Alexander announced the participation State and in the spring of 2014, the Dutch parliament took several important decisions regarding organising care and welfare. From now on, decisions on services and measures will be taken at local level: close to the people. The starting point in this is that support that is available in natural networks will be used first. People can only request support from official services at a later stage. Next to promote the ideal of citizens' empowerment, their personal responsibility and means are needed to maintain the current level of governmental care. But in the meantime many people feel estranged from the authorities that guarantee care and security. They mainly experience bureaucracy and a lack of influence on what happens to them. Therefore the message that policy will take a different course is now mostly seen in the light of making necessary savings on collective services.

This makes an appeal for personal responsibility seem like a double encroachment on the citizen's position: fewer entitlements for higher personal contributions.

#### Family Group Plan

This relates to the discussion in NL about activating citizens, certainly when problems or conflicts occur. The conference model has proven to deliver effective plans also in situations in which the government should intervene. However, there is a tendency to build the model into the procedures of formal authorities and to use it as a care methodology for some citizens, at the discretion of the professionals. But it can't be emphasised enough that this approach is not a methodological support tool but a RIGHT for a family group to make a plan before the government or others can or will intervene. And rights are enshrined in legislation and valid for all citizens. The Dutch Parliament has recently recorded the right to a 'family group plan' in the new Youth Act and earlier recorded this right in the Civil Code by the revision of child protection measures. After a long delay, January first 2015, is finally the grand moment for this citizens right. The methodological tool here is about offering relevant professional information on problems and appropriate services. In this way FGC is system-change in decision making compared to traditional government/professional interventions.

#### Cost effective

Smart government understand that by leaving control to citizens over their own lives and substituting professional decision making, plans citizens make have a cost reducing effect. Research into the exact economic effects is still in its infancy in NL, but the first results show promising light on this subject. Research into EK-c's in Child Protection in Amsterdam show that less supervision orders were pronounced, resulting in less demand for out-of-home care. A significant financial saving remains, even after deducting the costs of EK-c's. Another study from the Technical University Delft into the cost effects that EK-c's would have on 100 families with multiple problems show that a financial saving of at least €4,500,000 could be realized.<sup>i</sup>

#### Vision is key

At the same time we experience in NL a major shift of government level by the decentralization of the whole social domain to the municipalities. Once again the system-world is playing it's favorite game: reorganizing the world to make things better (for families?). It remains to be seen whether municipalities will be able to realize these broad responsibilities and whether there will be no gaps, especially since this decentralization is accompanied by austerity blow. And indeed, it has little or nothing gained if the municipal government just continues to steer, regulate, provide services and solve problems, in casu doing things for people or to people.

For us we will continue to use 'FGC-Netherlands style' as crowbar. To very much keep up the vision that citizens uniquely are able to in their own situation and together with other directly affected, discuss what is going on, aimed at making a plan for a solution.

Rob van Pagée

Amsterdam, Oktober 30, 2014

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<sup>i</sup> *Benefits and effects of Eigen Kracht-conferences, (2011) Dr. Martin Schuurman Article published in Jeugdbeleid, #4 (Youth Policy)*