

Report Summary
***From initiative to impact: An
assessment and evaluation of
Genie@ACE, Chalmers***

A report on the 4-year pilot project Genie@ACE at the
Department of Architecture and Civil Engineering,
Chalmers University of Technology

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From initiative to impact: An assessment and evaluation of Genie@ACE

“Promote diversity through a focus on women and nonbinary people, to foster equality and opportunity throughout ACE”, was the mission statement of the pilot project Genie@ACE, carried out at the Department of Architecture and Civil Engineering (ACE), as part of the wider Genie – Gender Initiative for Excellence – at Chalmers University of Technology.

Funded by the Chalmers Foundation with a substantial investment of 300 million SEK in 2019-2028, the wider Genie represents one of the largest commitments to gender equality made by any university. The Genie@ACE project was conducted in 2021-2024 as a pilot study of how to integrate gender-related issues structurally into the system. This is a summary of a namesake report with the *purpose of describing the various initiatives and methods used within Genie@ACE and assessing and evaluating them.*

Genie@ACE coordination group met every two weeks throughout the four years. Bri Gauger was its leader/coordinator for the lion's share of this period. The coordination group consisted of five to six members, but the members have varied slightly over the years. They represented different seniority levels and different research areas. Two of them had research backgrounds in feminist theory. The group included the equality representative and the Dr. Genie representative. The equality representative in turn attended regular meetings with the ACE equality group, which also consisted of the head of department ('prefekt'), the coordinator of Genie@ACE, the HR partner, and the head of administration. The Genie@ACE coordinator attended meetings with Genie representatives across Chalmers, run by the Genie central. The Genie@ACE project was granted 4 541 000 SEK from Genie/Chalmers foundation (an additional 2 000 000 SEK had been allocated to ACE before the project).

INITIATIVES TO ADVANCE GENDER EQUALITY

An analysis of gender aspects of the Rules of Procedure/Arbetsordningen.

Genie@ACE's structured gender analysis of the Rules of Procedure became a significant contribution to Chalmers. Genie@ACE advocated for mapping gendered positions, identifying barriers and desired support, conducting an inventory of assistant professors, and ensuring equal conditions regardless of gender. Many of their recommendations regarding revising evaluation criteria were implemented in the new Rules of Procedure in early 2022.

Academic citizenship. Bri Gauger began a postdoc research project in 2022 to analyze the academic citizenship criteria from the Rules of Procedure alongside people's lived experiences at the ACE. Gauger eventually developed a 'Academic Citizenship Recognition Strategy', based on the idea of not only *measuring* academic service but also *valuing* it.

Gender aspects in education. This part tied very well in with the ongoing work to integrate gender equality, diversity and equal treatment (JML) at Chalmers.

Gender aspects in research. Genie@ACE wanted to promote research that integrated gender into projects. Workshops were popular among researchers with varying prior knowledge.

Training seminars and workshops. The Genie representative at ACE attended and reported back from workshops arranged by Genie at Chalmers central. The content has spanned from gender equality in academia and bias awareness to leadership and culture.

Sexual harassment. A national study on sexual harassment in higher education in 2021 showed alarming figures for Chalmers: Female students, female PhD students, and, to some

extent, female employees, are subjected to more sexual harassment than their average peers. Genie@ACE contributed by formulating a response to the Vice Chancellor and the Research Program Board (FUN), detailing how ACE addresses gender inequalities and harassment.

Networks. Four networking initiatives were funded by Genie@ACE during the period 2021-2022: *The Gender and Pedagogy working group*, *Women in Tech Gothenburg network*, *PhD network*, and *Plurality and Diversity network for sustainable, built environments*.

Communications. Communications was a key asset for leveraging initiatives. The awareness of what Genie@ACE was doing, how to get involved and who to contact was very high. Regular outputs were updates in the ACE newsletter and a PPT slide at Torsdagsfika.

Employee surveys. At least four employee surveys with gender equality questions were conducted at ACE. These surveys have varied greatly in design which means that they are not always comparable with each other. Yet, Genie@ACE recognized their agenda-setting power.

The action/operational plan (Verksamhetsplanen). Adding their activities and objectives to the operational plan was key to integrating the work of Genie@ACE in the routines and processes of Chalmers. Internally, Genie@ACE continuously followed up on these activities.

Strategy. Genie@ACE contributed to a new ACE strategy. Inclusivity was identified as a core value. In the description of research, ACE states: “We believe in achieving academic excellence through teamwork and collaboration”.

INTERVIEW STUDY

An interview study, with eight interviewees involved in the Genie@ACE project, was conducted in December 2024-January 2025. Some interviewees were coordination group members: Bri Gauger (coordinator), Leon Müller (Dr Genie representative at ACE), Isabelle Doucet (founder of Genie@ACE), Ann-Margret Hvitt Strömwall and Dilek Ulutas Duman. Other interviewees were Maria Saline (Genie coordinator at central Chalmers), Henriette Söderberg (head of ACE department), Martine Buser (gender equality representative at ACE).

The main sources of pride that emerged from the interview study were: 1) **The group** and its positive atmosphere, its diverse composition, and significant achievements. Gauger’s leadership received particular praise – she was described as knowledgeable, inspiring, and genuinely committed to driving change. 2) Members commented proudly on the coordination group’s departmental **impact**, noting that even seemingly small initiatives like workshops prompted meaningful reflection among colleagues, creating ripple effects that will continue over time. 3) Another source of pride is the excellent **communications** of Genie@ACE. “If you ask anyone who is an employee at ACE what Genie@ACE is, they can answer your question immediately”, says one member. 4) The work on the Rules of Procedure and on the Academic Citizenship represented a very “structured” and “exemplary” work where Genie@ACE also addressed larger Chalmers issues.

The main challenges identified in the interview study were:

1) the **relationships to Genie at central Chalmers and to Chalmers management**. Several interviewees noted that there was “not much going on elsewhere”. Interviewees were certain that Genie@ACE had a great impact on the general awareness of gender equality issues at ACE, but doubted it had much influence on Chalmers at large.

- 2) Although the coordination group members all agree that it has been an incredibly positive experience to conduct the work – the analyses, the workshops, the trainings, etc – at ACE, it has been far more difficult to get the required changes *implemented and executed*. Having made gender inequalities in the organization visible, the members of the Genie@ACE coordination group would like to see more measures taken on the systematic level.
- 3) Some interviewees believe that the most challenging was to create a *mobilization* among those people who are not genuinely interested in questions of gender equality.
- 4) Although Genie@ACE raised the awareness around gender at the department, a few interviewees are hesitant as to what extent *organizational culture* was impacted. Some interviewees identify the *hidden power structures* as a major challenge.
- 5) Several interviewees bring up the topic of certain forms of equality work being dismissed as ‘*activism*’ and ‘*advocacy*’ as a major challenge. This is linked to concerns about the continuity of the equality work and its space within the institutional structures of Chalmers.
- 6) There is a lack of enthusiasm about the *future* direction of Genie.

DISCUSSION IN LIGHT OF RESEARCH ON GENDER EQUALITY WORK

Methods. The pilot project can be holistically examined against the backdrop of typical gender equality methods (cf. Wahl et al 2018, Molefi et al 2021), and it has undoubtedly within its timeframe and budget executed significant gender equality work.

Assimilation vs. separation. Genie@ACE can be conceptualized as a *micro-level change agent*, focusing on change from within the structure (see Dahmen-Adkins and Peterson 2021). ‘Tempered radicals’ (Meyerson and Scully 1995, Meyerson and Tompkins 2007) are dedicated to both their organizations and causes that may challenge the dominant culture. Unlike traditional activists, ‘tempered radicals’ don’t seek to tear down the system. Instead, they work persistently to bring about change from within.

A small win strategy. The Genie@ACE change strategies aligned closely with two of those identified by Meyerson and Scully (1995) as typical of ‘tempered radicals’, specifically *Small Wins* and *Local, Spontaneous, Authentic Action*. ‘Small wins’ involves identifying achievable, manageable goals instead of attempting large-scale changes. The coordination group did not anticipate the project’s trajectory at its inception. They behaved authentically with pride, determination, and positivity, which likely created ripple effects.

Activism. The rejection of ‘activism’ might reflect pressure to lean toward ‘assimilation’ rather than ‘separation’, to use the Meyerson and Scully (1995) framework. This aligns with the growing focus on gender mainstreaming in academia (Walby 2005, Callerstig 2022). Flood et al (2021) argue that feminist advocacy is waning as more individuals consider feminism unnecessary. The ‘post-feminist’ narrative posits that women have achieved equal rights, that gender inequality and women’s oppression are history (Anderson 2014).

The group and its leadership. Strong cohesion, mutual trust and a sense of belonging enabled the group to establish numerous initiatives and networks. Frequent mentions of action-orientation, efficiency, and cultural impact echo findings on factors that invigorate individuals in organizations (Cross et al 2004). The team’s camaraderie distinguishes this change project from others, where change agents often report feelings of isolation (Hearn et al 2015).

Resistance and support. The interview study suggests that Genie@ACE encountered minimal cultural resistance (cf. Cockburn 1991), with largely positive reception within the department. The team’s inclusion in Thursday fikas, for example, indicates their successful integration.

Challenges in connecting with certain individuals could potentially reflect cultural resistance, though it might also result from busy schedules. Instead, institutional resistance (cf. Cockburn 1991) seems more prevalent beyond departmental lines, where established structures, processes, and rules proved challenging to modify. Within the department, however, Genie@ACE's institutional resistance appears less significant, as structures, procedures and rules were revised. Beyond the department, institutional resistance proved more pronounced. This mirrors Callerstig's (2014) findings that gender mainstreaming can result in increased control functions and uncritical goal-checking without real impact on gender equality. Current gender mainstreaming priorities seem to leave little space for gender equality work centered on organizational culture and on cultivating awareness. Similarly, Benschop and Verloo (2006) argue that gender mainstreaming induces some transformation, yet it fails to significantly dismantle the genderedness of organizations. Genie@ACE enjoyed the active support of the heads of department. According to Pincus (2002), active support is characterized by leaders who publicly show a positive interest, promote gender equality work in their own organization, and contribute to strengthening the position of the gender equality workers.

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