As globalization progresses and migratory streams intensify, the number of borderland and cultural exchanges and intermarriages is increasing. This brings a new richness and diversity to our society, but can also bring new challenges and difficulties when those relationships break down. One of the difficulties that can occur is international parental child abduction, where one parent takes the child across another country, often their country of origin, without the other parent’s consent. This usually results in complex legal proceedings under the Hague Convention on the Recognition and Enforcement of Foreign Judgments in Civil and Commercial Matters, and a time of intense anxiety and stress for all family members involved. It is on this front that the broader aim of the project, mediation, is playing an increasingly significant part.

I recently had the privilege of taking part in the first training on International Family Mediation, organized by a number of organisations involved in international child abduction mediation – MAANET from Denmark, Child Focus and the Katholieke Universiteit Leuven from Belgium, and Districts Interregionale Kinderzorg from the Netherlands. The project was co-funded by the European Commission. Twenty-one mediators from twenty countries took part in this training programme, entitled ‘New Frontiers in Cross Border Family Mediation’. My contribution to this first stage of the project was to introduce the concept of international family mediation to a large number of the participants. I hope that this very brief overview of this exciting and challenging new area of mediation has been useful.

Mediation is an area of practice where the methods, skills and techniques used are relevant to family breakdown in general. The potential for a speedy, cost-effective resolution of a conflict is known under what circumstances such a mediation would not be appropriate or should be discontinued. Knowing who, in different cultures, value systems, religions, beliefs and traditions, all of which form both the background to the dispute

However, the multiplicity of factors that will play a part in such a mediation can easily be underestimated. First of all, there are the legal structures and frameworks within which such mediations take place, with which a mediator must be familiar. Then there are the issues of working in different languages, and most importantly, with different cultures, value systems, religions, beliefs and traditions, all of which form both the background to the dispute

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Mediation, however, offers a number of specific advantages to parents in contrast to a trial or arbitration. One of these advantages is that mediation is carried out by co-mediated, both joint and individual. The co-mediation team should ideally consist of one male and one female mediator, one from each of the parents' countries, and one being from a legal and one from a psycho-social background. This is not

Another potential advantage of mediation in child abduction cases, particularly where mediators are involved, is that the legal framework within which such cases are dealt with, because to an extent, the child abduction is the child stays with the abducting parent in the non-custodial country, as far as is possible. This means that the parties are able to address the issue of the return of the child (as stipulated by the Hague Convention or Brussels II bis Regulation, which makes it difficult to settle with regular access to the child even across borders. But from an application for return of the child, the legal process for it to be easier to mediate, the legal needs and interests of the parties can critically be discussed and distinguished from their legal positions, and the actual issues can be worked out such as, for example, how cross-border access may take place.

Another advantage worth mentioning is the potential for mediation to collate evidence and assess who, and under what circumstances such a mediation would not be appropriate or should be discontinued. Knowing who, in different cultures, value systems, religions, beliefs and traditions, all of which form both the background to the dispute

Finally, it’s a world about land practice, and the result is in the suggested model is applied by the organisations already working in this area. The first networks of international family mediation to be established on a regular basis, one of which is the International Network of International Family Mediators. This network is an umbrella organisation to which the above networks are relevant to family breakdown in general. The potential for a speedy, cost-effective resolution of a conflict

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