



Cross-National Research Papers

Seventh Series:

European Cross-National Research and Policy

## **6. European Cross-National Research and Policy Forum**

Edited by

**Linda Hantrais  
Susanne MacGregor  
Steen Mangen**

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William Solesbury  
Rossana Trifiletti**



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## Series Editor's Foreword

The seminars on which this seventh series of *Cross-National Research Papers* is based were a response to the perceived need for a forum at which social scientists can discuss the issues arising in research that crosses national, cultural and disciplinary boundaries, thereby enabling participants to learn from past experience and to plan more effectively for future international work. The seminars have maintained and built on the research of existing international teams. They have sought to consolidate links between social science research and wider society. An important aim of the seminars was to provide an informal environment for the exchange of knowledge and ideas with policy actors interested in the lessons that can be drawn from social science research.

The papers have addressed the theoretical, methodological, managerial and practical problems arising in comparative social science research projects across EU member states, with the overall aim of contributing to a better understanding of the research process, improving the quality of international social science, and encouraging dialogue and transfer of knowledge between researchers and policy actors.

Specific methodological objectives of the seminars and ensuing publications were:

- to contribute to methodological advances in cross-national research;
- to develop robust theoretical frameworks for comparative analysis of social systems and policies;
- to offer training opportunities to researchers embarking on international projects;
- to create synergy between researchers from different cultural traditions within the European context;
- to promote mutual understanding of regional diversity within the European Union and Central and Eastern Europe;
- to analyse social constructions of concepts, and factors affecting the comparability of quantitative and qualitative data, and indicators in European projects;
- to share and disseminate knowledge and promote dialogue between researchers, policy actors and users;
- to foster good practice in cross-national comparative research;
- to identify the conditions necessary for successful policy transfer and learning.

The six seminars explored the central theme of modernisation of the European social model within the context of socio-economic change, European integration and enlargement, and the policy challenges they present for governments.

We are grateful to ESRC for the Seminar Competition Award (RES-451-26-0020, 2003–04) that funded the seminars and ensuing publications and to the institutions that hosted the events. The final seminar in the series, from which this issue of papers is drawn, was hosted by the Department of Social Policy at the London School of Economics and Political Science.

*Linda Hantrais*

# **1. The Utilisation of Social Science Research in Policy: Building Connections and Relationships**

*William Solesbury*

Metaphors are a useful device, not just for their linguistic playfulness, but also because they often provide a way into new conceptualisations. In discussion of the (under)utilisation of social science, three kinds of metaphor are common, and all three are evident in the papers in the current series.

The first is the metaphorical term 'dissemination', borrowed from farming. This is probably the term in greatest currency. The implication is that all that researchers need to do is to spread seed that will then sprout and grow, be harvested and become wholesome food. Another kind is communication metaphors. Research and policy connect, well or badly, across bridges, along routes, aboard vehicles, in meeting places, through dialogues. The metaphorical varieties of communication range from the engineered to the interpersonal, but the common task is to create the connections. A third set of metaphors is about relationships: either the relationships between the two communities of research and practice or between individual researchers and practitioners. Here the metaphors are about common interests, shared language, respect and trust; and suggest, above all, that – as with personal relationships – success is achieved by working at it.

The farming metaphors cast the user of research in a passive role: the grateful beneficiary of the researcher's providence, which is unconvincing. Nobody has 'research user' as a job description. Policy makers and practitioners may use research to help them do their (otherwise defined) job: innovating policy, designing programmes, delivering services, evaluating performance. The question is how can research be made useful and useable to them in such work, when it is in competition with everything else claiming their limited attention. So the challenge is not how to improve research utilisation, but how to achieve more research-informed policy and practice.

The communication and the relationship metaphors are more helpful here. To start with, they clearly recognise that there are two parties, whether two banks of the river to be bridged or two people in conversation. But they also imply that there is a dynamic at play between the two parties.

Understanding that dynamic is the key to improvement. Here, we can turn to the structure/process/agency framework developed by Anthony Giddens for understanding social change. This argues that change occurs through the choices made by conscious actors, working through social processes and within societal structures. Policy change can be said to work in the same way. To achieve a more research-informed policy and practice, we, therefore, need to identify and foster all three elements. We need structures linking research and practice, as suggested in the communication metaphors. We need processes for their interaction: hence the relationship metaphors. But we also need agents to initiate and maintain processes within structures.

Louise Locock and Annette Boaz (2004) explore this agency role metaphorically. They suggest imagining research and policy as two nations. In developing their relations, people might take on various roles: as diplomats (representing one to the other, maintaining peace, developing alliances), as traders (exploring new markets for exports or imports), as translators (helping each to understand the other), or as migrants (settling – short or long term – in the other nation and contributing new

knowledge or skills). They argue that all these roles are needed. But, importantly, these 'border spanners' remain a minority; the majority of them stay at home (not learning the new language, not trading, not travelling) but helped in their business – as researchers or practitioners – by the work of those who do. That is surely true of research and practice.

Above all, such agency metaphors seem particularly appropriate and useful in the field of cross-national research and policy.

### **Reference**

Locock, L. and Boaz, A. (2004) 'Research, policy and practice – worlds apart?', *Social Policy and Society*, 3 (4), 375–84.

## **2. Policy Learning from Cross-National Comparisons of European Social Policies**

*Linda Hantrais*

*This paper draws on examples from the contributions to the seventh series of Cross-National Research Papers and from projects carried out under the European Commission's Framework Programmes to examine how cross-national comparative research in the social sciences can assist policy development at EU and national level. It asks what can be learnt from the series about the research-policy interface, what policy actors can learn from cross-national comparative research on European social policies, and how such research can inform policy. In seeking to answer these questions, the paper begins by analysing the relationship between research and policy with reference to four theories about the utilisation of social science research by policy makers and practitioners. It explores the differing nature of research and policy making, the limitations of social science knowledge, the capacity of research governance to integrate research and policy, and attempts to bridge the communications gap. The paper goes on to look at some of the ways in which the EU Directorates-General are stimulating the development of the research-policy interface in their efforts to promote best practice and policy learning, before providing a summary of the many ways in which research can be relevant to policy. In conclusion, the paper comments on the contribution of the papers in the series to synergy between researchers and policy actors.*

The aims and objectives of the seventh series of *Cross-National Research Papers* were ambitious. The authors have sought to contribute to a better understanding of the research process, to improve the quality of international social science in the study of European welfare policy, and to encourage dialogue and transfer of knowledge between researchers and policy practitioners. The first two objectives have been actively pursued since the publication was launched in 1985 with a view to making the papers available to a wide audience. The third objective, which has been an important concern throughout the seventh series, has proven to be one of the most difficult to achieve for a number of reasons, many of which have been identified by the non-academic contributors.

This paper seeks to answer three questions: What can be learnt from the present series about the research-policy interface? What can policy actors learn from cross-national comparative research on European social policies? How can such research inform policy and contribute to policy development? In doing so, it draws on examples from the research described in the five previous sets of papers in the series. Several of the contributors present the approaches they have adopted in carrying out projects under the European Commission's Framework Programmes. This paper looks at some of the wider issues that these and other EU-funded projects raise about the interaction between research and policy at European level. It also considers how DG RESEARCH is seeking to stimulate dialogue between researchers and the policy directorates-general in an effort to promote best practice and policy learning.

## Unravelling the research–policy interface

The relationship between academic researchers, on the one hand, and policy makers and practitioners, on the other, has never been easy. Several theories have been developed to explain the under-utilisation of social science research findings by policy makers, aptly summarised by Karen Bogenschneider *et al.* (2002) in an analysis of a series of state-sponsored Wisconsin Family Impact Seminars, and designed to encourage greater use of research in policy making. These authors argue that three of the four theories they examine suggest that efforts to improve the situation are doomed to failure. On the basis of the evidence culled from the contributions to the seventh series of *Cross-National Research Papers*, this view would seem to be unduly pessimistic.

### THE DIFFERING NATURE OF RESEARCH AND POLICY MAKING

The first theory portrays policy making as a ‘fast-breaking, self-serving, influence-driven process incompatible with the methods of social science, which are more time-intensive, intellectual, and rational’ (Bogenschneider *et al.*, p. 189). This incompatibility can be demonstrated by the differences in the time horizons and ambitions of politicians concerned about short-term outcomes that may influence the results of the next election and their public image, and those of researchers who are trained to probe ever more deeply into the complexities of social life with a view to producing robust and reliable findings. In the fifth set of papers, Sandra Williams stressed that: ‘policy makers not only want “good evidence” and examples of “good practice”, but they want it on a timely basis and have a keen eye for cost-effectiveness’ (Williams, 2004, p. 45).

The force of the time horizon and ambitions argument is being weakened as researchers are increasingly constrained by their limited resources and externally imposed deadlines, and as confidence and trust in the ability of politicians to deliver their election campaign promises are being eroded. On the basis of the experience of working in a UK government department and a non-governmental organisation, in her comments on the papers published in the second issue, Ceridwen Roberts pointed out that social science research findings are only one form of evidence. Politicians may be more readily swayed by the results of opinion polls, pressure groups, think tanks, anecdotes and journalism, the more so when they do not like the message coming from social scientists. Drawing on his experience of carrying out government-sponsored policy research, Bruce Stafford confirms this view when he states that it cannot ‘be taken for granted that policy makers always welcome research-based evidence. Policy relevant research will contain both “good” and “bad” news for policy makers; and the latter may be politically embarrassing.’ (Stafford, 2001, p. 85)

### RECOGNITION OF THE LIMITATIONS OF SOCIAL SCIENCE KNOWLEDGE

Secondly, social scientists, it is argued, are reluctant to communicate research findings to policy makers and practitioners, because they are aware of the limitations and incompleteness of their own knowledge. They are trained to be cautious, sceptical and reflective.

As illustrated by many of the contributors to this series of papers in their discussion of methods, the limitations argument applies to both quantitative and qualitative international comparative research. In the case of quantitative research, reliable

comparable data are often difficult to obtain and analyse. In the case of qualitative research, the findings are, of necessity, limited to a small, usually unrepresentative sample. The growing emphasis on evidence-based policy and the greater sophistication of quantitative and qualitative methods are undoubtedly improving the image of social scientists among policy makers and the incentives for them to work together (Davies, 2000). Ceridwen Roberts sounded an optimistic note when she commented that policy makers and practitioners are increasingly interested in knowing about best practice in other countries and are being challenged in their world view. She cautioned, however, that politicians are inclined to base their policy pronouncements on atypical examples, quotes and percentage figures taken out of context, with little or no understanding of meaning or causation, which is another reason why researchers are reluctant to pass on their findings to policy people and the media.

If policy makers are showing more interest in the findings from social science research, it may be partly due to the need to produce reports for the European Commission on the progress being made in meeting the targets set for EU member states under the open method of co-ordination. OMC has so far been applied in the areas of employment, poverty, pensions and health, and is based on the principle of naming and shaming. In her paper in the first issue in the series, Milena Büchs identified the problems that arise in trying to measure the impact of the OMC on domestic policy making. They are not very different from those that occur when attempting to assess the impact of findings from comparative social science research on policy making: policy actors may not be prepared to acknowledge that they are influenced by what happens elsewhere, because they want to present a policy initiative as their own; they are likely to choose examples of best practice that suit their own purposes and support developments that were already taking place. Nick Clark, representing the trade union's viewpoint, confirmed that, in the UK, governments are reluctant to admit that they have anything to learn from other countries, in the conviction that they are taking ideas to the European Union rather than the reverse. Büchs notes, however, that the OMC's benchmarking of national performance is an important element in policy learning since it involves constant comparison and mutual surveillance and can 'disturb former certainties of domestic actors, enhance competition among member states and facilitate the use of information about best practice' (Büchs, 2003, p. 37). These are all outcomes that could be attributed to policy research in general.

#### RESEARCH GOVERNANCE AS A FORCE INTEGRATING RESEARCH AND POLICY

Thirdly, the under-utilisation of the findings from social science research may be 'an artefact of a democratic, free-market system, which lacks institutional structures for integrating knowledge and power' (Bogensneider *et al.*, 2002, p. 189). The papers in the fifth issue in this series on the governance of research address these issues. Sandra Williams argued that intermediaries in government departments or research councils can play an important role in 'helping researchers to understand the needs of policy makers, and helping policy makers gain a better understanding of how research can be used both to inform and evaluate policy decisions' (Williams, 2004, p. 45). This raises questions not only about research capacity building and the strengthening of links between academia and services, but also about how research is funded and managed, how different research methodologies are applied, and how shared

standards can be developed for all stakeholders in the research process. Williams stresses the need for research sponsors to ensure good governance of research by underwriting high ethical and technical standards, which means striking a delicate balance between the control over research by funders and the autonomy of researchers. In her comments on the same set of papers, Birgit Arve-Parès drew on her experience as both researcher and sponsor of research in Sweden to demonstrate the importance of national research cultures and traditions in determining how power relationships are constructed between researchers and policy actors when mediated through research councils. With reference to the embryonic European Research Council, she therefore counselled careful consideration of how 'delegation is to be carried out, in what directions, for what purposes and how conflicting interests should be dealt with' (Arve-Parès, 2004, p. 53).

Bruce Stafford has also noted other ways in which the exercise of research governance may be a negative force for integration of research and policy, since 'research findings may disturb power relations in the policy process that support certain financial and societal arrangements. Some policy actors, for instance, may resist changes that a given research project might imply or recommend.' (Stafford, 2001, p. 85)

#### AWARENESS OF THE COMMUNICATIONS GAP

The fourth theory seeking to explain why social science research is under-utilised by policy makers and practitioners identifies a communications gap between researchers and policy actors (see also Susanne MacGregor's paper in this volume). The Wisconsin Family Impact Seminars were designed to fill such a gap by building bridges between 'two communities with different goals, information needs, values, reward systems, and languages' (Bogenschneider *et al.*, 2002, p. 189).

In their comments on the papers in the present series, the non-academic discussants often made the point that researchers do not know how to present their findings in a language that is jargon-free and comprehensible to end users. Nick Clark expressed the view that the language in the papers was 'forbidding' for non-academic readers and that it needed to be made comprehensible to a wider readership. The information needs of researchers and policy actors are very different. The emphasis in some papers was found by another non-academic participant to be placed heavily on theory and concepts, which were too far removed from the everyday work experience of practitioners, making it difficult for them to see how the information could be applied in the job context. This problem was less of a concern for the papers in the second issue in the series, where contributors paid more attention to the practicalities of managing and carrying out research in international contexts. However, Ceridwen Roberts made the point that policy makers and practitioners are not interested in conceptual issues or methods. Instead, they want to know what works and what findings matter. They do not have time to read academic papers, and are looking for brevity and useful abstracts.

The reward systems of the two communities are different. For politicians, the main reward is to be re-elected and remain in power. Academic researchers in the social sciences, particularly in the UK, are subjected to conflicting pressures: their reputation and career prospects as academics depend on research ratings, which are primarily determined by their ability to publish their findings in internationally peer reviewed

journals. Research funding and, increasingly, European Commission Framework Programme awards require applicants to involve end users in the research and dissemination process<sup>1</sup>. However, reports to sponsors carry relatively low weight in assessment of the performance of aspiring academics. Contract researchers, for their part, once they have embarked on the process of attracting grants from government departments, foundations, industrial funders, research councils and the European Commission, have little time to publish findings, thereby jeopardising their chances of becoming academic researchers.

The gap between researchers and policy makers may be more difficult to bridge in some countries than in others. The third set of papers, which was co-ordinated by Marie-Thérèse Letablier (2004) in France, highlighted important differences between French (Latin) and British (Anglo-Saxon) research cultures with regard to the research–policy interface. For British researchers, particularly when funded by research councils and government departments, the policy relevance of the research and the involvement of end users have become basic requirements, forcing researchers to formulate their proposals with an eye to wider dissemination strategies and opportunities for further funding, and to think in terms of solutions to policy issues.

By comparison, researchers in France, even when they are, paradoxically, under the direct tutelage of a government department concerned with social affairs or employment, still cling to the notion that researchers should not compromise their integrity by embarking on what is derisively referred to as ‘applied’ or ‘problem-solving’ research. Applied research is in conflict with their true vocation, which is to carry out ‘basic’ or ‘fundamental’ research, and contribute to grand theory, free from external influences, in the knowledge that, as full-time researchers employed by the state, their promotion is not determined by their fundraising or policy evaluation activities, and even less by their ability to disseminate their findings outside the research community. The discussant for the papers in the third issue, Annie Gauvin, was herself a former researcher who had moved on to a position at the Ministère du Travail et des Affaires sociales in a unit responsible for employment and professional training. She, therefore, had few problems in communicating with French researchers and was well placed to act as an intermediary between the research and policy communities. She recognised that policy makers need researchers, not only to collect, analyse and interpret data, but also to identify examples of good practice and find new ways of tackling persistent problems that prevent policy from being more effective. In her view, the role of researchers is to provide composite data presented in a form that is readily understandable and accessible to policy makers.

Another more positive perspective on the potential for meaningful dialogue between the two communities was provided by the papers in the fourth set in the series, which illustrated the value of the symbiotic relationship between researchers and policy actors in Estonia (Kustar, 2004). Most of the local participants were policy advisors from the Ministry for Social Affairs, and had been trained as researchers before taking up these positions. The Estonian participants were refreshingly aware of the interest of studying the experience of other countries and of comparing notes on ways of addressing similar problems. The seminar gave them a chance to discuss with their opposite numbers legislation they were drafting on issues being addressed in the papers. The practitioner discussant, Katrin Saks (2004), was a member of the Estonian Parliament, who had held ministerial office and was well known and respected by the research community for her interest in their work. She regretted that researchers and

policy makers do not co-operate more with each other and was able to propose a list of questions that she wanted researchers to help politicians to answer.

### **From policy relevance to policy learning**

A large proportion of the contributors to the series, especially among the British paper givers, were speaking from experience of working on European-funded projects, mostly under the Framework Programmes. One of the reasons evoked to explain why such a large proportion of the social science projects funded under FP4 and 5 were co-ordinated by British researchers (UK 85; France 44; Germany 55) is that their dependence on external funding, their training in writing research proposals and their track record for delivering results on time and within budget give them an advantage in international competitions. Another reason for their relative success may be that they are accustomed to thinking in terms of the relevance of findings for policy. A major objective of the European Research Area, when it was launched in 2000, was to increase the international impact of the European research effort by strengthening the relationship between research activities and policies. The reason for reinforcing the link between research and policy is clearly articulated in statements from the Commission (COM (2000) 612 final, 4.10.2000): namely, to legitimate the use of public funds to support research activities by ensuring the findings are of public benefit, the more so if research is to contribute to the implementation of public policies or can help resolve the problems confronting society.

In 2001, in an attempt to demonstrate that the projects and networks receiving Framework Programme funding were making an appropriate contribution to the European research effort, DG RESEARCH commissioned a review of a cluster of projects on one of the social science themes identified under the FP5 key action for 'Improving the Socio-economic Knowledge Base' (Hantrais, 2001). The brief for the expert reviewer was to report on the contribution of research to the analysis of public policies and to organise two dialogue workshops between researchers and policy actors, at which the findings would be presented and discussed (Cameron, 2003; Hantrais, 2003). Building on this experience, in 2003, DG RESEARCH commissioned 20 policy reviewers to identify EU policy directions in 280 or so projects and networks in the social science areas covered by the Framework Programmes, to draw out important policy conclusions or policy lessons, and to advance scientific understanding on matters relevant to EU policy.

In their proposals and final reports, Framework Programme researchers, like ESRC grant holders, are required to explain the contribution that their work will make to policy. With this aim in mind, the content of the calls reflects issues of concern to the policy DGs. Like national government departments, the policy DGs commission their own research and fund networks and centres to monitor current developments and report on issues of topical interest. It is, therefore, important for them to be aware of the research being carried out elsewhere if they are to avoid duplication. It is not unusual for the same researchers to be working on similar topics for DG RESEARCH and a policy DG. However, as we have already seen, policy people can rarely wait for research findings to be produced from research projects that routinely span a minimum of four years from the time when the proposal is drafted to the submission of the final report and publication of findings.

The papers presented in this series and the DG policy reviews demonstrate that research can be relevant to policy in a variety of ways that are not always made explicit. Answers to the questions about what policy actors can learn from cross-national comparative research on European social policies and how such research can inform policy and contribute to policy development can be found by scrutinising this seventh series of papers and European-funded projects. In summary, research contributes to the knowledge base about socio-economic change that policy makers draw on when formulating policies; it refines the concepts and indicators used by policy actors in determining policy needs; it makes policy actors aware of how the policy process operates at various levels in society and in diverse cultural contexts and how different policy instruments are used to deal with similar problems; it assesses the efficacy of policy delivery and evaluates policy outcomes; it helps policy actors understand the outcomes of policy for social practice by examining what works and, if so, why it works, with reference to socio-economic and political settings; it assists policy actors involved in policy transfer by showing how a particular policy may need to be adapted if it is to be introduced in a different national welfare setting; and, ultimately, it can help to make policy more effective in dealing with socio-economic issues by identifying and encouraging the implementation of best practice.

This series of papers has demonstrated that researchers – at least in the UK – are becoming more aware of the need to take account of the policy dimension in their work, and that policy makers and practitioners are becoming more interested in research findings. It is less certain that researchers and policy actors are convinced – at least in the UK – of the importance of incorporating an international dimension in their work. As many of the contributors to this and to earlier series have pointed out in their papers, international comparative research is expensive and time consuming; it requires experienced researchers, specialised management and people skills, and an intimate knowledge of different societies and languages and of their research cultures (see also Hantrais and Mangan, 1996). For institutions and funders, it is more difficult to control and adds to the already complex task of social policy formulation.

The papers confirm what is already well known: researchers are more interested in questions than answers; policy makers and practitioners want unambiguous and immediate answers to concrete questions. An important lesson that can be drawn from the series is that, if the relationship between the different parties is to be productive and symbiotic, they can all benefit from their greater awareness and understanding of their respective goals, values and working methods.

#### **Note**

1. The application form for seminar competition awards specifies: 'ESRC places special emphasis on meeting the needs of users of its research and training output. Where appropriate, please state the non-academic user communities (Industry, Government Departments etc) to which the seminar group meetings will be relevant and provide details of how they will be involved in meetings of the seminar group.'

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### 3. Improving the Dialogue between Social Science Research and Social Policy

*Susanne MacGregor*

*Many social science researchers do the kind of work they do because they wish to make an impact on policy. In addition, many research institutes, departments, centres and professional associations state as their mission the desire to link research, policy and practice. While it is always possible to argue for improvement in any sphere, to raise the issue of how to improve the dialogue between social science research and social policy in the European cross-national context is to imply that there is a problem and that dialogue might help to solve it. This paper considers these two assumptions and the various terms and concepts contained within them. The discussion is set within the context of the desire to develop a knowledge-based economy in Europe, together with the ambition to develop a European Research Area and appropriate networks. We are familiar with ideas of a European Social Model and the parallel emergence of policy communities gathered around specific social issues. These communities have an interest in policy learning, especially through examples of good practice and the development of measures of excellence. Research may be asked to provide answers to preset questions. It may also want to offer new ways of looking at issues or get neglected issues on to policy agendas. The question of improving dialogue can be approached from a relatively narrow or a wider perspective. These perspectives link to discussions about the appropriate role of the researcher on a continuum from tame technician to critical citizen.*

To raise the issue of how to improve the dialogue between social science research and social policy in the European cross-national context is to imply there is a problem. It also hints that more dialogue would be a good thing. This paper considers these two assumptions and the various terms contained within them. Based on a review of the papers presented in the seventh series of *Cross-National Research Papers* and developing some of the themes that have emerged, it delineates how the problem is perceived, presents examples of difficulties, examines where dialogue appears to work best and raises a number of points for further discussion.

The problem of communication is an especially important one in our contemporary post-modern society, characterised as it is by increasing diversity and fragmentation. If we talk of dialogue, we assume there is a purpose to dialogue. Is the purpose to reach agreement? The implication is that the context is one of difference not of consensus. Whereas the technocratic welfare state rested on an assumed consensus of values, the view now is that we live in a post-welfare state society, a pluralistic society in which research cannot be limited merely to a technical function.

The conditions for dialogue should also be mentioned. In trying to reach agreement through dialogue, there must be mutual respect between the parties, an organised agenda and a time scale through which the process will move.

#### **Communication and dialogue in social science research**

The science–policy relationship continues to exercise the social science community.

When the UK Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC), which funded the seminars resulting in this series of publications, carried out a consultation on its future strategy, one of the questions asked was: 'How...knowledge could best be created in dialogue with, and transferred to, potential users of research such as policy-makers, businesses, voluntary organisations and the general public'.

Answering this question is more difficult than it might at first appear. Defining features of science (and thus of social science) are activities related to defining solvable problems, testing ideas against reality, the importance of controls and the key role of peer review (Wolpert, 2003). Key issues for the research–policy relationship are about retaining integrity in collecting evidence, which can be undermined by too much involvement of policy or users in the research process, and ensuring openness in explaining how scientific advice has been obtained and interpreted. While researchers and scientists are often criticised for being 'pointy-headed' and lacking communication skills, the focus on the question of the integrity of the research process turns attention as much to the politicians and policy-makers as to the scientists themselves.

The ambition to link research and policy is, however, widespread, partly fuelled by the need to justify public expenditure on research and to demonstrate the relevance of social science to a sceptical government or public. The mission statement of the ESRC itself makes such a claim: 'The Economic and Social Research Council is the UK's leading research and training agency addressing economic and social concerns. We aim to provide high-quality research on issues of importance to business, the public sector and government. The issues considered include economic competitiveness, the effectiveness of public services and policy and our quality of life'.

In all this, it is useful to distinguish between pure, basic or theoretical research, strategic and applied research. The first category, pure research, is an area that is generally left to researchers to pursue without too much intervention in the process, although policy influences what gets funded and who gets funds. The area of strategic research is important in social policy, and it is here that territory is often contested as policy may take the view that research should restrict itself to delivering the facts while politicians, civil servants and the public are the ones who should decide what to do about these facts and how to interpret them. Social policy specialists often find this difficult to accept as they may themselves be guided by values and even ideologies. Certainly, many have political orientations that influence their choice of topic and the conclusions they draw from their research. Applied research is often seen as inferior within the academic community, in social science and in a range of subjects from physics to sociology that favour the theoretical above the applied. If we are to encourage applied research, there is a need to provide incentives, which are currently rarely present in many academic communities. Much of this kind of research is carried out by consultancies or other self-financing organisations, which can devote themselves more closely to the demands of the contractor without the constraint of other obligations, such as teaching or development of the subject or discipline. In addition to these three categories, we might want to highlight evaluation as a form of applied research – evaluation is a key type of research within the field of social policy. The issue of the research–policy relationship thus varies depending on the type of research we are talking about.

At the European level, the contemporary significance of the debate about dialogue in social science links to the development of the open method of co-ordination (OMC), which was a key theme in the first set of papers of this series and re-appeared in

subsequent discussions. Its significance is also enhanced by the increasing emphasis placed on research in Europe. Along with more funds comes more stress on research being accountable to funders: researchers are expected to demonstrate their usefulness. The assumption is that learning by comparing across national systems can be used to enhance the quality of policy making and that benchmarking as a broadly defined process of comparing, evaluating and peer reviewing has a role to play in supporting policy learning. All these issues are linked to the emergence of the 'new public management' within European social policy. Its ideas and practices are central to the concept of 'modernisation', which was also a key theme of this series of papers.

At Nice in 2000, agreement was reached to advance social policy through the OMC, by using a management-by-objectives approach, whereby EU institutions would draw up guidelines and monitor their implementation by member states. The European Commission was invited to identify good practice and promote common acceptance. Set within the Lisbon agenda aim to build a knowledge-based economy, member states are encouraged to work more closely together. Current or prospective membership of the EU thus draws policy actors into cross-border policy learning and transfer.

The first set of papers, which focused on the concept of a European Social Model, paid attention to the OMC as a process. It was observed that there is seemingly more dialogue and working together in the field of economics than in areas relating to politics and society. Some contributors thought that there is a need for a consensus of values before dialogue can even begin. Some commonalities must be present, but a related question was: 'How much is enough?' It was observed that much dialogue already exists. There is institutionalised interaction among policy makers, that is, one can see the formation of epistemic communities in a number of areas. Outputs relating to these processes include the publication of comparable information.

Linked closely to the quest to modernise social provision are the ideas and practices of the evidence-based movement. This builds on developments within evidence-based medicine, which is 'the conscientious, explicit and judicious use of current best evidence in making decisions about the care of individual patients' (Sackett and Rosenberg, 1995). Within this is the desire to enhance what is sometimes called the 'academic-service' relationship through better dialogue or communication, in which an evaluation of the relative power of each sector is implicit.

A set of ideas and practices are thus interlinked: the new public management; a decline in professional prestige, status and mystique; greater use of external measurement and controls; and use of guidelines, briefings and practice aids. Such developments are clearly of benefit in the area of health care if they reduce the extent to which systemic errors occur with adverse consequences to patients. Similarly, in wider social policy, efficiency and effectiveness are valuable ambitions as are ideas for improving the quality of social care. Better dialogue between research and policy is central to all these ambitions.

Another theme in the context of developing better dialogue revolves around discussions about establishing a European area of research and innovation, which featured as a topic in the series (see particularly n<sup>o</sup> 5 of the papers). The case for it assumes that a significant role can be played by research and development in generating economic growth, employment and social cohesion. Proponents argue the need for better integration of research activities at national and EU level, through

developing mechanisms for networking national and joint research programmes. A key aim is to foster the dissemination of excellence.

'Investing in research: an action plan for Europe' (Commission of the European Communities, 2003) identifies some barriers to achieving these goals. They include: shortcomings and rigidities of research careers; dispersion and lack of visibility of some excellent research; difficulties encountered by small and medium enterprises in financing research and innovation; and a lack of awareness of researchers with regard to the protection and management of intellectual property.

There were about 1.6 million researchers in member states and acceding countries in 2000. About 1.2 million additional research personnel, including 700,000 more researchers, are deemed necessary by 2010. To do this, a need has been identified to attract world-class researchers to Europe; make research more attractive as an occupation, especially to women; and reduce losses at various stages, including through retirement. Dialogue between research and policy would be helpful on how these ambitions could be achieved and on any unintended consequences.

In a context where the aim of integration sets the frame for the policy–research dialogue in Europe, we can ask which topics would be most highly valued? From a reading of key documents, it would appear that social science is seen as most relevant where it addresses issues related to employment and economic policy, education and training policy, general issues of labour market reform, regional development, fiscal policy, legal frameworks, human resources and the workforce (including the research workforce), global security, studies of small and medium enterprises (SMEs), and studies of public finances. By implication, dialogue on other topics would be less favoured.

Policy and research are only two of the actors (or stakeholders) in the political game of identifying priorities, making decisions and allocating resources. Other important users of research are the general public and industry, and other specialist interest groups and voluntary organisations.

### **Why promote dialogue between research and policy?**

Contributions to the second set of papers in the series noted that it is the ambition of many social policy researchers to impact on policy. They see it as part of their task to contribute to policy formulation and planning and to the implementation and evaluation of outcomes. Many projects include the aim to transfer knowledge between researchers, practitioners and users. Participants are more effective in achieving this aim if, throughout the research process, they keep this end goal in mind. There was agreement on the importance of being aware that policy-related research takes place in neither a political nor an economic vacuum.

Contributors to the fourth issue of papers noted that research can identify new problems and questions before they come to the attention of policy makers. It was argued that more attention should be given to such issues, for example questions relating to minority needs or the rights of children. Research should not be too closely tied to the current policy agenda but should try to alter it and is of value partly because it may offer new ways of looking at an issue. While the work–family balance is a shared concern across Europe, some questions were raised as to how much researchers are involved in the policy-making cycle and to what extent they are listened to by policy makers.

The papers in the fifth issue raised the question whether or not the development of common practices and standards (especially around ethics, commissioning and dissemination) would aid dialogue. Contributors asked whether researchers give policy-makers what they want and, if not, why not.

The RESPECT project has produced a user's guide on dealing with socio-economic research in the information society (Huws, 2004). The guide highlights that one key problem is the lack of understanding among policy customers of the complexity of the research endeavour. It contains a section called 'What to look for in a research proposal?', which encourages commissioners and funders to go for quality research. The elements that should be addressed are: utility and relevance; originality; qualifications of the team; its experience and track record; its reputation; appropriateness of methodologies; access to resources and research subjects; management capability; communications skills; willingness and ability to disseminate; adaptability; relations with client; and value for money. Lengthy comments are provided on each of these. If all policy makers likely to be involved in dialogue with researchers were required to spend half a day reading this document, relations between the two sides might improve, as policy would perhaps have more respect and sympathy for researchers. But will this happen? Will busy policy people find the time to read it? Another key issue relates to how wide a circle of people are involved in any dialogue. Do we see small, closed circles or larger, more open ones?

Contributors to the third set of papers commented that research can provide useful insights for policy makers, not least by unravelling some of the indicators, concepts and notions that are critical to an understanding of the policy process. Policy actors need researchers not only to collect, analyse and interpret data but also to identify examples of good practice and to find new ways of tackling persistent problems that prevent policy from being effective.

How an issue is framed affects the nature of evidence and the progress of dialogue. Do researchers always have to work within the frame set by policy or can they contribute to reframing? This was the ambition of progressive reformers for much of the history of social science. How then can dialogue be encouraged which focuses on frames as much as on techniques or findings?

Another influential factor on the nature of dialogue has to do with the setting in which this takes place. Where does this work best? Does it work best where researchers are outside government and form links, or where researchers work inside government? Which has most influence: insider or outsider? It might be thought that outsiders have more independence and can offer more challenging contributions to the dialogue, but this is not necessarily so, given the constraints of the contract culture. Advisers brought into the central administration drawing on their research but having a policy brief can play a particularly influential role.

### **Barriers to communication**

Contributors to the third set of papers noted that there are apparently many shared policy objectives in Europe, such as the requirement to raise employment rates and improve the quality of employment. But concepts do not have the same meaning in every member state and are not used in the same sense by researchers and politicians. Among the many other communication problems hindering dialogue are use of different languages (and codes and jargons). These can be exacerbated at

European level where effects of translation produce many misunderstandings. The emergence of jargon or bureaucratic language may be a response to this. For example the paper by Jean-Claude Barbier (2004) in the fourth set of papers presented in Paris stimulated much discussion about the concept of '*précarité*' (precarious employment). Nor does it have the same contextual meaning in different countries, where there are different perceptions and where different measures are used.

Resources are a key barrier to improving dialogue. While everyone pays lip service to the value of wider dissemination of research findings, few funders are prepared to pay for this activity or build it into the evaluation and management of projects. A related resource issue, which is perhaps even more important than money today, is that of time. The undoubted increase in the pace of work in contemporary society acts as a barrier to dialogue, reflecting partly the demands of new information technologies but also other changes in our ways of communicating.

A key feature of the end of the welfare state and the emergence of a post-modern state and society is that of increasing fragmentation. There are no longer unitary blocks of 'researchers' and 'policy makers' between whom dialogue might be established. Each of these has dissolved into a myriad of sub-entities who find it as hard to communicate with each other as with members of another block, as testified by the problems of communication between layers of government in a devolved administration, between government departments, between the many new agencies in the contracted-out services, between different professions, sub-professions and para-professions, between different specialisms and disciplines, between competing universities and research centres, and so on. No wonder so much attention is paid to networking and increasing partnership and communication in a context where most forces are working in the opposite direction. As chaos increases, attempts to impose order through more and more audit, assessment and review, and tighter management practices are perhaps an ironic manifestation of the hopelessness of the ambition.

### **Making dialogue work**

The conditions often identified for successful policy transfer between countries could arguably apply equally with regard to the transfer of ideas (that is improving the dialogue) between research and policy. Both parties should have a commonality of objectives and a shared definition of the issues to be tackled; they need to be compatible with regard to political ideology and values and institutional practices; they need to agree that dialogue is desirable, feasible and practical and be aware of the constraints under which they both operate; and dialogue must be affordable and accountable in terms of perceived benefits and costs, and value for money.

The methods used to enable dialogue involve the provision of material around which discussions can take place. They commonly involve the collection and classification of scientific and 'grey' information on key sectors, spatial areas and individual country experiences, analytic studies and cross-country comparisons, and dissemination of this information via newsletters, internet sites, publications, conferences and meetings, and training, fellowships and summer schools.

Discussions focusing on examples of good practice and policy lessons were thought useful. International meetings provide an opportunity for the exchange of ideas and experience. Examples drawn from other countries are one aspect only of the information being fed into the policy process. Some may prefer to look at their own

past or their own recent experience. When is experience from other countries of more interest? This seems to be when a new social problem appears that existing approaches have not had to address – for example the arrival of drugs, race and ethnicity issues, questions around equal opportunities, inner city riots – or where problems cross borders, again exemplified by drugs, migration, organised crime or trafficking. This may also be more likely where political elites have lost faith in existing paradigms, as illustrated by the frustration with old welfare state solutions or the collapse of the Soviet paradigm in social policy. These pressures lead to a search for new approaches, and civil servants and advisors go outside and import ideas to challenge existing orthodoxies.

Which models are chosen may depend on an overall evaluation of the culture of that country – old Europe, new Europe or Nordic models – or may reflect existing networks and contacts, ease of language and culture, accident, or deliberate selling of a policy package by another country or agency.

One could consider this issue with reference to the concept of a supply (production and distribution) chain with regard to knowledge. Improving the process would involve identifying barriers to supply. These might include such features as that the producer simply does not produce what the customer wants; that the product is of poor quality, raising questions around quality control; there may be production problems relating to a lack of ingredients, raising issues around research capacity; there might be faults with the management of production and distribution, relating to barriers like customs posts, currency differences, and issues of the shelf-life of the information produced; and the price might be too high in relation to the quality and desirability of the product.

In the US, it is more common to hire former government officials in universities, research centres or think tanks. And perhaps, in this case, academics are more used to dealing with the media. The European tendency appears more likely to involve relating to government on terms set by government. Researchers seem less able or willing to deal directly with the public, understandably so perhaps, since dealing with the 'public' these days means allowing discussion to be filtered by journalists with all the distortions and problems that arise in this relationship. Attention to developing real participation and engagement with the public is less prominent than it ought to be. Where it happens, it often seems to depend on the energy and enthusiasm of particular charismatic individuals. For researchers to be strong and equal partners in any dialogue, they need to have a robust case to argue which means quality research.

Networking emerges as a key activity in this process of building channels of communication to assist in dialogue. This may involve meetings and training opportunities or more formal arrangements such as the use of sabbaticals to allow a period of time spent in another setting. It can encourage mutual understanding and sharing of knowledge in a deeper and more systematic way, and allow joint working on a shared task or project.

Improving dialogue between policy and research would address not solely issues related to particular research projects or policy topics but also the general framework in which research is conducted. Dialogue would consider issues of research careers, human resources, settings for research and how to improve the quality of research.

### **Tame technicians or critical citizens?**

The key question in all this is whether anyone is listening? Experience suggests that

policy players just do not have time to read research reports in depth. They need briefings and short executive summaries to help them absorb what researchers want to say. They are often even too busy to attend scheduled meetings with researchers. Instead they pick up information from a range of sources of which research results are only one. A key question is in what circumstances do policy makers listen to research? It seems this is more often when there is pressure to act from politicians or the public or the media, and when there is uncertainty about what to do. This may be because a new problem has arisen outside the current frame of reference or experience; then experts are turned to for advice.

This series of papers has highlighted the value of comparative studies and shown that what is seen as problematic in one society may not be considered a cause for concern elsewhere. Discussions have referred to the role of the policy environment, the political and economic climate, and the acceptability of state intervention.

How far research findings influence policy decisions seems partly to reflect differences between those issues about which most people think they are knowledgeable or have a view (for example sport) versus those which seem mysterious and strange and of which they claim no knowledge (for example drugs).

Historical studies show that an accumulation of research evidence in social science has influenced policy development, for example the social investigations of the interwar years, social surveys of juvenile delinquents or of education and social mobility in the 1960s. More recently, evidence on hidden problems such as domestic violence or child abuse, in conjunction with pressure group activities, can be seen to have played a part in effecting social change.

Researchers need to realise that policy makers are not homogeneous. Sectional divisions and variations between departments and layers also exist there. And researchers need to be aware that talking just to formal policy makers like civil servants might not be enough with regard to many issues. There may be an equal need to mobilise and engage with people at the grass roots level.

Discussion of the value or not of improving dialogue between research and policy and what means might be used to do so have revealed that the issue now is framed primarily within a process that involves the development of a particular social model, one characterised by the New Public Management. This is the essential ingredient in the notion of 'modernising' Europe. So the wider debate is: What kind of Europe do we want to see? What is meant by modernisation and where do social scientists and progressives fit within it?

The idea of and hopes for a rational social policy were a feature of the welfare state and a former technocratic age. We are in a new era now, one that involves criticisms of experts, the rise of religious extremism, the rediscovery of dogma and ideology, and deep oppositions in terms of beliefs. This is not a context conducive to the consensus on values and ends required for rational policy making, where the only debate is about finding the best technocratic solution: the 'what works' approach. Oddly, we see two quite different, contradictory currents presently at work in social policy: increasing stress on the role of values alongside the promotion of the 'what works' approach. The very concept of relevance is worthy of further attention. What does this term mean? In general, it seems to be politicians and civil servants who define what is relevant. The media may play a part here too. There are dangers in following too closely a utilitarian agenda, even of becoming philistine. In this series of papers, we have noted some differences in traditions and current constraints between the English (Anglo-Saxon)

and continental European (French) approaches to the role of the researcher. Different traditions accord different values to the role of the intellectual and the place of the university or other research centres.

Factors that seem to encourage the pursuit of better dialogue are found where there is more interest in improving policy, which seems to occur where social change is speeded up, and where there are rising expectations on governments. It fits with the modernisation agenda, which includes ideas about calling on expertise and using research through reviews of existing evidence, commissioning new research, piloting initiatives and programmes and evaluating new policies, and inviting experts to advise on specialist topics.

Factors that seem to limit the influence of evidence on policy include what has been termed bureaucratic logic – the idea that things are right because they have always been done that way – and the presence of risk averse cultures. And time is an influence: where people have scarcely room to think in a context of frequent change, there is less space for orderly thought and evaluation of evidence. Then politics dominates.

In all our discussions, the tendency has been to focus on dialogue with the elite, but we must also consider the relations of research to the mass and to civil society. Researchers need to engage also with these wider groups and not always funnel their findings and interpretations through policy elites. This links to our wider discussions within the series about what kind of Europe we want to see and whether or not we accept all aspects of the modernising Europe agenda.

In this context, researchers must retain a space for critical scholarly work while also recognising the value of improved technical competence. So long as the political mission is to transform the EU into a research-intensive, high-tech, knowledge-based economy, one might ask: 'Would research or scholarly endeavour which questioned these aims be supported?' For example, research and dialogue on environmental impact, the social impact on less able or disabled people, the value and measurement of economic growth, and issues relating to the quality of life and well-being.

Within the American Sociological Association, a distinction has been offered between professional social science, work intended primarily for academic journals and peer review, policy social science, which involves solving problems for government or business, and public social science (Burawoy presidential statement to ASA 2004 conference). What should be the right balance between these types of activity?

Similar arguments about the dangers of 'producing technically competent barbarians' have been raised within European political science (Rothstein, 2004). Problems identified have included the increasing segmentation of university life, the dangers of too much methodological and technical specialisation, and problems that arise when technical proficiency becomes the metric for evaluating quality (quoting Paul Pierson, 2003, of Harvard). Added to this could be the desire of privileged circles to control policy discussion and to limit the contribution of research to simply measuring and modelling. One way forward would be to reintroduce philosophical debate to social sciences. This might be done partly through greater discussion of the ethical issues involved in both policy and research – a topic that would attract the interest of many parties in this dialogue – and one to which contributors to this series have drawn attention.

Finally, in discussing the question of improving dialogue between researchers and policy makers, it is important to note that both also have other identities. They are men

or women, have cultural and ethnic identities, are of different ages and body shapes and abilities, religious affiliations, beliefs and values, backgrounds, families and neighbourhoods. Overarching all this, they are citizens of a Europe that aims to be a democratic configuration. For such a democracy to become real and for a valuable dialogue to take place, the key ingredients of western democracy would need to frame and provide the context and infrastructure to the dialogue: that is freedom of assembly, freedom of information and freedom of speech. In general, policy actors, like civil servants, are restricted in what they can say or publish. The danger with pressures to tie research more closely to policy is that the expectations and routines of political and administrative life will be extended to apply to researchers too, thereby limiting their ability to speak out, to publish and to form alliances with groups other than powerful decision-makers. While increasing dialogue between research and policy may be desirable and should be bound by rules of diplomacy and courtesy, research must continue to stress its independence even as it is required to justify its receipt of public funds.

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## **4. Mediating between Social Researchers and Policy Makers**

***Robert Anderson***

The paper by Linda Hantrais in this volume has underlined the different nature and perspectives of research and policy making. The resulting communications gap is reinforced by a lack of mutual understanding regarding working methods and objectives, and misplaced assumptions about what the other party wants or needs, as highlighted by Susanne MacGregor in her paper, and as illustrated by Dagmar Kutsar with reference to the situation in Central and East European countries. This short commentary seeks to clarify some of these expectations, mainly from a policy maker's perspective. Of course, not all policy makers want the findings of 'this' research (at this time) or will ever want 'those' results (especially when it takes so long to get them), but the focus here is upon making research and knowledge useful, that is, relevant, accessible and applicable.

The author works to commission and disseminate research to meet the needs of policy makers, specifically at European level; as such, he claims no more than some familiarity with, and an imperfect understanding of, the contributions of research and policy. However, as do researchers, and to an even greater extent policy makers, it is essential to acknowledge the need to live with imperfection.

Good cross-national comparative research is exceedingly difficult for all sorts of reasons; these include a lack of shared understanding of concepts and terminology, problems with control over research methodology and limited capacity for interpretation of results from a multinational perspective. These problems apply to both quantitative and qualitative studies. Yet, such research is also highly valued because comparative data from cross-national studies are a basic resource for policy makers in both national and international organisations. Cross-national research also enables rethinking, challenges unquestioned assumptions and may provide policy makers with insights from the application of different policy measures in other settings. Experience from other countries usually does not constitute a controlled natural experiment, but appropriate research may take policy makers a significant step forward in their knowledge and imagination.

Evidently, all social research projects are limited to some extent in their scope, the range of questions addressed, the methodology employed or the coverage in relation to population, countries or duration. Many policy makers are sensitive to the limitations of a research project and have a good understanding of the implications. Both researchers and policy makers face time constraints and budget restrictions, but within these parameters they perhaps have a common interest in promoting sound comparative research of the highest quality. A tension may exist between research excellence and timely, practical outputs, but policy makers equally need dependable research that is not undermined by methodological inadequacies.

Policy makers know from their own experiences of developing and implementing social policies that complex social problems are difficult to resolve in a pre-determined direction; firm evidence is often hard to find. So they do not expect research projects or policy evaluations to come up with all the answers. They do not wait for a 'magic bullet' to remedy a longstanding social problem or suppose that one research project will

provide specific answers to a raft of social problems. They may complain that researchers are too careful or hesitant in interpretation of their results, but they are equally sceptical of studies that produce conclusions that are banal, very general or Panglossian. Many problems arise in translating research results into policy recommendations, especially if policy interests have not directly informed the original research questions. As other authors in this series have pointed out, it is difficult to hit a target if you do not aim at it. The drawing up of researchable questions is a highly skilled task demanding awareness of policy issues as well as knowledge of the potential contribution from research. It requires involvement of policy stakeholders in the development of research projects and in reflection on research results as well as in the formulation of conclusions and recommendations. Some policy makers clearly need incentives to be involved in this process and to use research.

In a context of rapid global change, policy makers continuously need updating on the social situation. On social policy issues, divergent interest groups – even different groups of policy makers – are always likely to have different views of the social reality, and their realities and perspectives are often quite different. Social researchers can help to articulate these different perspectives and, with quality research, promote more tailored and focused knowledge of the social situation. In social policy, this capacity of research to give voice, particularly to disadvantaged groups, is especially valued. The need to understand the circumstances, preferences and behaviours of different social groups underlines the value of qualitative as well as quantitative studies.

The adage that there is ‘nothing as practical as a good concept’ applies forcefully in the social policy arena. The complexity of the social world emphasises the need for reflection and for theories or conceptual frameworks to support comprehension of social reality. Policy makers do not always want or expect answers to problems, but they value assistance to think about the issue and to gain a better understanding of phenomena of interest to them. Both empirical results and concept papers can support the development of new ideas or the setting of neglected issues onto the policy agenda.

To what extent, however, are researchers capable of, or committed to, informing the policy making process? Many professional and institutional reasons can be evoked for researchers to be wary of becoming too involved: personal and paymaster priorities may be publication in academic journals; they may have witnessed disregard, misuse or interference in research by policy makers; they may consider themselves naïve about politics and policy making processes; or the culture of research can make it uncomfortable to propose actions which transcend the complexity of social issues. Researchers have skills, expertise and obligations that are not generally shared by policy makers and *vice versa*. So the positive interaction of research and policy, and the derivation of benefit for the targets of social policy, may require more specific measures. In particular, the role of intermediaries – policy and government advisors, think tanks, evidence-based policy organisations – should be considered further. These are resources dedicated to, and particularly skilled in, building knowledge over time and bridging the communications gap – making research relevant and accessible to policy needs. Timeliness is an important issue: much research has a long shelf-life; the difficulty is knowing when to take it off the shelf and how to use it. The potential for the timely and targeted exploitation of research to inform policy is underdeveloped and undernourished.

## 5. Bridging the Communications Gap between Research and Policy in an Enlarged Europe

*Dagmar Kutsar*

*Due to the legacy of Soviet rule and rapidly changing social reality during the period of social, economic and political transition, the relationship between research and policy has a different meaning in the countries of Central and East Europe, compared with Western Europe. For the CEE countries, membership of the European Union has involved adopting a large body of social *acquis* and joining a European Research Area that they had no hand in shaping. Many of their social scientists were trained to work within a research culture where sociological research was subordinated to the ideology of the state, and where they were discouraged from developing independent lines of inquiry or publishing findings in internationally refereed journals. Compared with former times, social scientists today can see that the door is more open for academic researchers to influence the policy agenda. Several new research units and think tanks have been established to work closely with government. However, communication channels between researchers and policy makers remain poor, not only because the two communities are speaking different 'languages', but also because they each have their own dilemmas to solve before embarking on the bridging process. The paper highlights the issues that both parties need to address and explores some of the ways in which bridging might be promoted.*

As with previous waves of new membership, when the transition countries of Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) became members of the European Union in May 2004, they had to agree to implement the large body of *acquis* that they had had no hand in shaping. In the field of research, this means striving to achieve the strategic goals laid down in the Lisbon European Council Presidency conclusions of March 2000 for the European Research Area (ERA), by enabling the Union 'to become the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world' (COM 2000) 612 final, 04.10.2000). As in other policy areas, the new member states have come under pressure to undertake major structural reforms to their systems of research governance. This is a process that is ongoing and has been helped by the early participation of CEE countries in the Commission's Framework Programmes.

The contributions to this series of *Cross-National Research Papers* were designed to address the central theme of modernisation of the European social model within the context of socio-economic change, European integration and enlargement. This paper considers the impact of transition on the relationship between research and policy in the former Soviet states.

### **The impact of transition on the relationship between research and policy**

For the CEE countries, the challenge in the research area has been considerable, as demonstrated by the papers in the series. The wider Europe was an important theme in the first issue, and the papers in the fourth issue report on a seminar held in Estonia. Nick Manning's paper (2003) examined some of the classic questions that the collapse of state socialism has posed for the understanding of macro-level change in European

societies from the perspective of a Western researcher. He made the important, and frequently overlooked, point that CEE societies have diverged in their development since 1990. He went on to ask whether diversity had arisen from a common origin, or whether it could be explained by path dependency from diverse origins. He noted how difficult it was to determine whether general comparisons hold right across a society, or even across its welfare system, using the treatment of women and children to illustrate his arguments. The fourth issue of papers was also interested in the question of children in society and in research. My introduction to the papers (Kutsar, 2004) noted that some of the tools routinely used by researchers in Western Europe are not well suited for assessing the situation in the transition countries, for example poverty measures and, more especially, measures of childhood poverty underestimate the extent of the problem.

Under Soviet rule, the autonomy of researchers was severely restricted. Most research was commissioned by the state. It was usually quantitative and descriptive, and the findings were ideologically determined. Researchers were discouraged from developing independent lines of inquiry, and their research tools – questionnaires as well as publications – were carefully censored. After independence was regained in 1991, reorientation from a Soviet-style paradigm towards competition-based international collaborative research was essential. Compared with the natural sciences, social sciences had been more isolated from the international academic audience. Several of the social sciences (sociology, political science, social anthropology) were missing from university curricula. For this reason, the change of paradigm was not merely organisational but also concerned the very basis of scientific thinking (Heidmets *et al.*, 2001).

For researchers of my generation, the opening up of research has involved a steep learning curve and a change of intellectual mindset. For the younger generations too, it has not always been easy to embrace change, mainly because they lack milestones with which to locate differences in relation to the past. In her comments on the papers, Katrin Saks (2004), a member of the Estonian parliament and former government minister, recounted that, when she visits Estonian schools, she always finds that children do not know how to ask questions or express opinions. If researchers do not know how to ask questions, they will never be good researchers, and they will not be able to provide the answers that politicians are demanding of them.

In the CEE countries, it is still too early to claim that co-operation between social scientists and policy makers is working effectively. However, compared with former times, social scientists today can see that the door is more open for academic researchers to influence the policy agenda. Several new research units, such as the Department of Social Analysis at the Ministry for Social Affairs, and think tanks, such as the Open Society Institute, which was the successor of the Soros Foundation, the Round Table of the President, and the Association of Political Studies, PRAXIS, have been set up to work closely with government in Estonia. New models of co-operation between research and policy are being developed. However, communication channels between researchers and policy makers remain poor, not only because the two communities speak different 'languages', but also because both groups face their own dilemmas that need to be resolved before embarking on the bridging process. As Ülo Vooglaid (2000) has stated, information is a source of power for policy makers. For this reason, they are concerned not to lose control over research. They use their funding capacity to safeguard their power base. By contrast, for researchers, data become

information after they are interpreted within a particular theoretical framework. Interpretation of data, therefore, needs not only a sound knowledge of methodology but also neutrality and objectivity. Researchers see politics as subjective because of the ways in which choices and compromises are made in reaching solutions, whereas the impacts of policies, whether direct or indirect, are objective.

Academic researchers often complain that policy makers ignore their work. At the same time, policy makers know they can be more convincing if their arguments are 'evidence-based' and reflect social reality as reported in academic research. Social scientists can suggest to policy makers what works and what does not, what the impact of policies has been and what the outcomes of planned laws and policy measures are likely to be. In the case of transitional societies, a simple solution for a policy maker is to copy international experience without analysing whether that experience can be transported into a different social, economic and political setting. Reflections on social reality in analysis by researchers can provide input for information-based policy formulation, thus enabling decision making to be more independent from external influences (Heidmets *et al.*, 2001). As transitional societies develop towards mature societies, imported solutions need to be exchanged for 'scientifically informed' policy making.

### **Building bridges**

Social researchers and decision makers can find a common meeting ground if certain conditions are in place. The common ground may be based on a research project that is attached to a national programme or is part of an international comparative project with local significance. Good communication and mutual understanding are preconditions, as stressed in the Commission's Communication (COM (2000) 612 final) on the European Research Area and in the Estonian Research and Development Strategy for 2002–06 (<http://www.hm.ee>).

However, the main common ground between researchers and policy makers in the case of a transitional society is a rapidly changing social reality. This is the field in which a researcher's academic curiosity finds fertile soil for nurturing new research questions. It is also the source of inspiration for revising well-known theoretical frameworks or for elaborating new ones. For decision-makers, rapidly changing social reality raises new policy questions needing quick and straightforward answers that will enable them to meet policy aims, the demands of supranational agencies and coalition agreements at one and the same time. This is a situation resembling a 'fire fighting' exercise, in which the policy interventions applied are those that are expected to produce the highest immediate impact. Although the transition from point A to point B reveals unknown developmental tracks, risks as well as challenges exist for both researchers and decision makers, and a single 'right' solution can rarely be found.

In a verbatim report of the proceedings of the Estonian Parliament in May 2002, Siim Kallas, the Prime Minister of the Republic of Estonia recognised that:

The government needs scientific analyses of social processes that are made without passion. ... The government has the task of making choices and, for this purpose, needs high quality information and analysis. ... Research and development activities are important, but the bridge between them is weak.

([web.riigikogu.ee/ems/stenograms/2002/05/m02052315.html](http://web.riigikogu.ee/ems/stenograms/2002/05/m02052315.html))

Even if communication between social scientists and decision makers is effective, researchers can still only fulfil an advisory role, mapping the situation and suggesting possible development scenarios, including the analysis of risks and resources (Heidmets *et al.*, 2001).

If researchers are to collaborate with policy makers, it means doing research that is policy driven and framed by the policy agenda. The quality and clarity of information provided by researchers in reports to policy makers may have high potential for knowledge-based policy debate and participatory democracy. Social studies constitute an important tool for evaluating a country's level of social development and for assessing the impact of policy. They can seldom be used as direct planning instruments but are able to provide general information on social conditions to broaden perspectives, extend public debate and assess the impacts of political decisions on social reality, all of which indirectly helps understanding and influences policy decisions.

### **Using social research in policy formulation**

The use of social research in policy formulation can be seen as contributing to the democratic process of decision making, and presupposes the involvement of interest groups and of those who will be affected by a given policy. The transition countries do not have a tradition of civil society involvement in the policy process. Normative content analysis of explanatory memoranda for draft acts has revealed biased application of social research findings (Kasemets, 2004). Most of the draft acts before parliament in 1998–2003 that had significant budgetary, socio-economic and administrative impacts were not underpinned by reliable information that was made available to the public. Among six information categories, only two have been described as being at a satisfactory level: one related to the analysis of the budgetary impact and the other to compliance with EU law. Information concerning socio-economic impacts on target groups, administrative changes, references to information sources and consultation with interest groups has not been deemed to be satisfactory.

Another study carried out by Tatjana Doroshko and Dagmar Kutsar (2004) reached a similar conclusion. Notwithstanding the assumption that

...good decision-making is informed decision-making, where all those who have a potentially useful perspective on the problem or a necessary role in the decision can participate with accurate, commonly understood information relevant to their concern (de Neufville, 1975, p. 57)

in practice very often the linkage between indicators and political action or decisions is tenuous (Cobb and Rixford, 1998, p. 23). The case of implementation of the unemployment insurance scheme in Estonia confirms this assumption: social indicators did not have a central place in the policy-development process; decision making was not sufficiently 'informed'. In an interview, the former Minister for Social Affairs commented on the inadequate use of social statistics in developing the scheme and gave the impression that there had been no time or resources to allow careful and systematic research into the issue (Doroshko and Kutsar, 2005).

Both researchers and policy makers are facing dilemmas. For academic researchers, the conflict is between the pursuit of excellence and practical outputs; the development of theoretical approaches and the application of findings to social reality; the intrinsic interest of research and practical needs. Policy makers are looking for a

balance between policy frameworks and rapidly changing reality; the immediate and longer-term effects of policy; the demands of supranational agencies and national objectives and action plans; objective truth and the potential for strengthening political ideas; the logic of common sense and the consequences of political decisions. These dilemmas are shared with countries in Western Europe, but they are perhaps more acute and more difficult to resolve in the transition countries because of the Soviet legacy and, in some instances, due to the absence of a clear vision of the implications of rapid transitions.

In our study of the uses of social indicators in political decision-making in Estonia, we concluded that:

The challenge for policy makers and researchers is to solve internal dilemmas as well as choosing the 'right' language of communication between research and policy, which could serve the national interests and fulfil the formal requirements of European institutions. The challenge is to integrate the scientific 'hard' knowledge and extra-scientific (soft) knowledge of policy-makers and interest groups. In other words, the optimisation of resources is needed for more 'informed' and well prepared decision making, accompanied by social-political analysis of both external and internal factors. (Doroshko and Kutsar, 2005, forthcoming)

Last but not least, policy makers, especially in transitional societies, need to develop a clear motivation in using social research and in consulting civil society; researchers need to develop a better understanding of the role of think tanks in the policy cycle.

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## 6. Widening Perspectives in Comparative Research and Policy

Leena Alanen

*This paper addresses issues raised in this series of papers about the perspectives that researchers can bring to policy development in the area of childhood studies. Children and childhood have largely been neglected in academic research on both welfare and welfare policy. When attention is devoted to children, the focus tends to be on single childhood issues, and children are treated as being in a preparatory stage for adulthood. The social scientific study of childhood starts from a broader, non-adultist discourse on children and childhood. Children are viewed not only as 'becomings', but also emphatically as social and cultural 'beings'. Using this kind of approach, the task in the child welfare field is, firstly, to improve the understanding of how children's welfare is constructed and the material, social and cultural processes generating their well-being (or ill-being) and, secondly, to use this knowledge to rethink child welfare policy. Cross-national research and policy discussions can speed up the process in a number of ways: by making explicit the diverse (and mostly unquestioned) cultural knowledge of childhood that permeates welfare research and policy; by rethinking, critically and comparatively, the existing policy frameworks, as in the European Social Model and welfare state regime typologies, from the standpoint of the specific social status of children and their interests; and by making explicit the powerful ways in which social and political structures and policies in a number of fields constitute 'hidden' childhood policies in the European region.*

An important aim of this series of *Cross-National Research papers* has been to contribute to a better understanding of the cross-national comparative research process, while encouraging the transfer of knowledge between researchers and policy actors. This paper addresses issues raised in several of the contributions, and especially in the fourth issue in the series, about the different perspectives that researchers can bring to policy development. The aim is not to attempt to generalise across the many policy domains that have been explored, but rather to use the case of childhood studies to illustrate how policy is formed and developed. The paper is based on personal experience as a university researcher, and as a participant in a number of national, Nordic, European and global research networks that have as one of their goals to get childhood onto European research and policy agendas. While the story so far is not one of great success, the lesson learned is, indeed, of the growing necessity to introduce wider theoretical and practical, as well as ethical perspectives, into social research and policy making that concern children and their lives and welfare.

The general argument is, firstly, that academic research in the welfare policy domain has largely neglected children and childhood and, secondly, that, when the focus is on children, it tends to be on single childhood issues. Moreover, in this research children are typically treated in an instrumental fashion; what seems to matter is the end product, the worker, taxpayer or citizen, and not children and their everyday welfare. In the social policy domain, similar assumptions are also used to justify policies: children are, therefore, treated as suitable objects for economic, social and cultural investment that will, in due course, produce societal gains. Policies to alleviate child poverty, family

benefit packages and the provision of day-care services to children of working mothers exemplify this trend.

The paper also underlines the problematic utilisation of children and childhood issues in and for policy development by showing how researchers can open up wider perspectives for policy-makers: perspectives in which children, too, are treated as actors with a definite, socially constructed and historically varying status, and with their separate interests.

### **Challenges for researchers**

After several decades of welfare state development, the research and policy literature on welfare and well-being is already extensive. However, on closer reading, and this time from the viewpoint of how children and childhood issues appear in the literature, two challenges emerge that point directly at the need to widen perspectives in European welfare policy and research, at national, cross-national and comparative levels. The one is the empirical challenge: to fill the gaps in the present meagre knowledge on children's welfare. The other is the conceptual challenge of recognising the underdevelopment of theory on children's welfare, to promote theorising and conceptualisation, and to proceed towards linking the theoretical and the empirical, with the aim of having an impact on policy planning and political decision making. To sustain the commitment of European states and their governments, as well as the European Union, to promoting the welfare of their citizens, both these challenges need to be met, and brought into comparative European research and policy.

Two empirical observations underline the empirical challenge of missing knowledge. Firstly, at present the quality of children's well-being is a consistent and even vocal concern in public discourse and political debates across European countries. Also, the living conditions and social circumstances of children today are widely believed to result in problems for individual children in their interaction with their significant others and the social world in general, which in turn has implications for the future of Europe. If governments want to promote welfare for their citizens, this implies a strong need in both public discourse and welfare policy making for scientific evidence on the current state of children's welfare (or 'illfare') and their well-being, and on the social 'production' of welfare: that is the economic, social and discursive 'mechanisms' of welfare production (see for example Miller, 2003).

However – and this is the second, contrasting observation – the existing scientific knowledge about these social processes, or 'mechanisms', through which children's state of welfare is generated at a given point in time and space, and recognised and responded to by wider society, remains amazingly scant. When it does exist, its approach is narrow: that is children and childhood have been largely overlooked both in academic research on welfare and in the welfare policy domain.

This is a strong claim and needs to be qualified. Some attention has, undoubtedly, been focused on children within both research and policy domains. It has, however, tended to be on a single issue at a time, such as poverty, child labour, or comparisons of a single child welfare system, such as child benefits, the provision of education or day-care arrangements. Also children have been used in research and policy debates mainly in an instrumental fashion, as 'means' rather than 'ends' of welfare efforts. Basically, they have been added to the story of welfare development through the assumption that being a child – having the socially assigned status of a 'child' – means

being in a preparatory stage for adulthood and citizenship. Here, the age-old socialisation paradigm is at work; the paradigm that depicts children as merely 'becomings', and not 'beings', even less as full citizens. Different sociological traditions and schools of thought have their own refined notions of 'socialisation'; it is not a homogeneous construct and, therefore, such critiques may not apply in every case. Also 'socialisation' can have its uses, as when the concern is with what adults do when their goal is to prepare children for life in the social worlds of which adults are a part. Critics of socialisation claim that the notion has its limits if the aim is to illuminate what children themselves do while being socialised (which has an impact on the products of socialisation), while completely ignoring the other processes and activities in which children are also engaged while being socialised. Texts on children's socialisation should, therefore, be read as 'portrayals of adult perspectives while recognizing that other perspectives are possible' (Waksler, 1991, p.1; see also Thorne, 1987; Alanen, 1988, 1992, for other critical readings of 'socialisation').

A recent example of this approach, and one that is gaining strength in policy debates, is the discourse that advocates 'investment' in childhood, especially during early childhood (for example Esping-Andersen, 2002). In this discourse, children are seen as reasonable objects of economic, social and cultural investment through policies such as poverty alleviation, provision of family benefits or educational services, the expectation being that societal gains will be reaped from such investment some time in the future. Children's present welfare is of interest only insofar as they will be the adults of the future.

The theoretical challenge is grounded by the observation that in the welfare research field, children have not yet been anywhere near high on the agenda. Even the notification of such an omission (and it is possible to speak of an outright neglect of children and childhood) in welfare (and welfare state) research is fairly recent. A direct, explicit focus on children is, however, vital not only for developing policies for children's present-day welfare and well-being but also in other policy areas. Most obviously, children and childhood are central issues in educational policy. They are of course strongly linked to the family, gender and equality policy domains, and need to be taken up in each of these and in other policy fields, directly and in their own right, and not as side issues for other policy matters.

### **Towards a social scientific study of children**

The social scientific study of children and childhood that has emerged during the past two decades (recognised as childhood studies) is a rapidly growing field of social research, and a critical resource for widening the viewpoints and approaches presently applied in the development of welfare policies in the European social policy regime. It is a vital resource because it introduces new issues and topics as well as new methods for policy development, for example for hearing children's 'voice', as with the UN Convention of the Rights of the Child.

Secondly, the notification of the development of childhood studies, and the results the field is already producing, are contributing to widening perspectives by identifying existing policy paradigms, and unpacking ('deconstructing') and questioning their culturally loaded, discursive structures and values, and the interests and power relations grounding these paradigms.

Thirdly, structural methodologies within childhood studies are useful for promoting a genuine social justice perspective with children as a focus group. This involves analysing and revealing how social policy agendas and paradigms impact structurally on children, how they give shape to children as a social group (category), their relations to the rest of the social world, and the quality of these relations, inclusions and exclusions, centralisation and marginalisation, liberation and oppression within which children's daily lives are lived. To do this work, comparative analysis and assessment is needed of both existing and future social welfare policies, programmes and institutions to find out how they distribute material, social and cultural resources among different sub-populations, not least children as a social group that is no longer subsumed under families, households, educational institutions or health and welfare services.

As the political economist Alison Watson (2004) has recently argued: 'Understanding how children are affected by, and themselves affect, the emerging global economy and society is crucial to being able to understand both the present and future dynamics of the international system' (Watson, 2004, p. 4). Cross-national research and policy discussions are, thus, needed to speed up the process of making explicit the cultural knowledge, values and (mostly hidden) interests in existing and proposed policy frameworks that actually impact on the daily lives of children. Cross-national research and policy discussions are also needed to bring into focus and develop platforms for welfare policies in which children are recognised and respected as a historically and socially constructed population group, whose present material, social and cultural state matters, not only for the future of Europe, and the global society, but also for social justice between present-day generations.

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## 7. From Research Methods to Policy Practice

*Rossana Trifiletti*

*Policy makers have generally relied heavily on quantitative data to provide evidence to demonstrate the effectiveness of specific policy measures. A number of the papers presented in the current series illustrate the contribution that qualitative methods can make to the understanding of issues that are of interest to policy makers. This paper examines the value of qualitative research, firstly, in defining social problems in ways with which policy makers were previously often not familiar and, secondly, in assessing policy effects on the daily lives of respondents. Inevitably, the paper raises questions about the extent to which the practice of qualitative comparative research can produce and disseminate acceptable 'knowledge'. Several of the projects described in this series suggest that the 'correct' way to handle this kind of 'data' cannot be inferred from the experience of treating quantitative evidence. The main problem is not so much how to avoid selectivity and bias but, rather, whether we can trust the spontaneous relevance of our subjects and allow it enough space to emerge. This involves a much more subtle ability to evaluate the freedom and 'activity' of respondents and to capture the subtext of the terms employed, and it moves the ethical implications of the whole research process centre stage.*

The papers by Linda Hantrais and Susanne MacGregor in this volume show how researchers and policy makers have been attempting to work more closely together to improve policy development. Their comments suggest that policy makers have generally expected researchers to use quantitative methods to produce evidence that will demonstrate the effectiveness of specific policy measures. Several of the papers collected together in the present series illustrate the value of qualitative methods in promoting understanding of issues that are of concern to policy makers. This paper argues that many of the contributions in the series seem to converge in defining a methodological common ground in cross-national qualitative comparative research, which can be seen, in a much broader sense, as a specific feature of the projects carried out under the European Commission's Framework Programmes. The case has been made that the demand for qualitative sociology has grown in contemporary society not only in response to processes of individualisation and differentiation, but also with the emergence of mixed markets demanding applied qualitative research that is different from academic research. These research consumers include marketing, advertising, information and welfare services insofar as they have recourse to quality evaluation (Melucci, 1998). In the UK, this growing interest on the part of policy makers has resulted in the commissioning by the Cabinet Office of a framework for assessing qualitative evaluation (Spencer *et al.*, 2003).

The aim in the present paper is less to provide a set of explicit methodological suggestions than to try and capture a sort of subterranean 'methodology-in-use', which can be seen as an integral part of the specific kind of research task faced by the projects described in this series. Such a task is located between sociological research questions, as defined in the research cultures of different countries, and the compelling need to identify policy-relevant implications of the knowledge produced.

Having to face such a practical task, usually within strict time limits, requires a more concrete approach. We might ask whether a shift has occurred at the same time towards a stronger emphasis on daily life, as researchers attempt to describe systems of meanings within their local contexts, and to understand rather than explain them. We can also note other cultural features of the Framework Programmes, which tend to point in the direction of a deliberately qualitative logic, as exemplified by the deep affinity between qualitative methods and gender sensitivity represented in a number of projects (Trifiletti, 1999).

However, it is worth asking whether this is an opportune moment to develop a more contextualised construction of meanings, or even the use of non-obtrusive techniques in cross-national research. On the one hand, it can be argued that the format of the Framework Programmes does not seem to lend itself to such an approach. On the other, the very convention of structuring projects as separate 'work-packages' and staged 'deliverables' for dissemination, to use Eurospeak, entails the danger of suggesting that a deductive logical link exists between packages and their supposed 'applications', by adopting too strict an analogy with the procedures used in the natural sciences. Paradoxically, from another perspective, the European convention may be useful insofar as it requires different national research teams to find ways of working together and offers them a provisional common language, until such time as a local code can be developed that is more appropriate for describing what is being done.

These factors would seem to be much more influential in opening up a space for a general qualitative approach than has been the focus on a single qualitative technique, which emerged from some of the Framework Programme 5 projects (Cameron, 2003). What we are trying to capture here is a truly reflexive logic, involving the research design.

The comments presented in this paper are based on ideas that have not yet been fully developed. They can be structured around three main interweaving themes: the importance of granting a phase of learning in a qualitative research design; the plasticity of such an evolutive research design; and the importance of controlling for the agency role of respondents.

### **The learning phase in a qualitative research design**

The paper draws together examples of good practices, which emerged from the contributions to the series and from direct experience in the context of a specific Framework Programme 5 project entitled 'New Kinds of Families, New Kinds of Social Care: shaping multi-dimensional European policies for formal and informal care' (SocCare)<sup>2</sup>. They go beyond the different topics that were the focus of the individual subprojects but have not yet been located within a robust theoretical framework. The intention is to be faithful to the logic of learning from experience, which is embedded in qualitative sociology and could tentatively be exported to comparative research.

Approaching different national contexts in terms of a conventionally defined common research object usually involves a phase of uneasiness for national teams. This is a time for learning very similar to that which every ethnographic researcher has to face at the beginning of fieldwork, although it has the same strategic value. In other words, the 'research questions' and 'research purposes' (Creswell, 1998), formulated in non-neutral terms, emanate from a specific cross-national debate, or scientific curiosity, which the co-ordinator has the task of preserving. S/he should not impose a uniform

solution on partners to overcome the productive phase of uneasiness, but nor should s/he let the national teams reframe the research question in terms that are more firmly located in national research practices. Her/his task is to remind team members of the research question originally agreed in the face of the complexities of successive operationalisation and sampling decisions. This, in no way, lessens the importance of preserving a respectful attitude towards the specificities of each national context and the construction of meanings by stakeholders.

This situation would seem to be made more explicit in projects that are closer to action research, as described by Mel Evans (2004) in the Framework Programme project entitled 'The Contribution of Social Capital in the Social Economy to Local Economic Development in Western Europe' (CONSCISE) and by Ingrid Eysers (2004) in her study of care provision for older people in Germany and the UK, both in the second issue in the present series of papers. It was also very apparent in the SocCare project, since the rich connotations of the term 'informal care' were not so obvious in southern European countries as in Anglo-Saxon debates. In southern Europe, 'caring' is deeply embedded in family obligations: to some extent, looking at Italian or Portuguese caregivers in Anglo-Saxon terms underlined their agency. All this seems to suggest that the initial, more direct way of doing comparisons, grounded in the mediation of national experts and descriptive reports (Oyen, 1990; Hantrais and Mangen, 1996), has already been overcome in these projects, as exemplified by a number of the Framework Programme projects, which start with a description of national contexts and move on very quickly to an approach assuming a shifting framework of resources and constraints, in which single actors move more freely.

Such an approach also implies that, even if it is necessary to avoid any reduction of openness to non-rigorous practice of data collection, and even if, as has been correctly suggested, 'at the end of the day, hypotheses must be tested against some explicit criteria' (Mangen, 1999, p. 110), it should also be possible to abandon them the following day.

In many of the projects presented in the papers in the series or within the Framework Programmes, a substantial redefinition of the research design or the sampling frame was discussed, accepted and, thereafter, found to be useful (CONSCISE, SocCare, Procare<sup>2</sup>), not as a form of pragmatic accommodation, but rather as a way of ensuring that other relevant phenomena in the field could be included. As a paradigmatic case, in the fourth issue of papers in the series, Julia Brannen (2004) described a phase of the original research that gave birth to another separate research project in its own right. At the other end of the continuum, Fred Deven and Valérie Carrette's (2004) paper underlined a real difficulty in comparative secondary analysis of existing research on childhood, due to the rigidity of disciplinary research designs.

The next task, which can usefully be presented in terms of a learning process, is to get the different national teams geared up to carrying out the various phases in the research. This is a long and arduous process, in which many different strategies seemed to prove valuable, including the 'gift attitude' of some research co-ordinators who try to pull along other national teams by the force of example of a job well done, as in the case of the project examining 'Old Age and Autonomy: the role of service systems and intergenerational solidarity' (OASIS), reported by Judith Phillips and Mo Ray (2004) in the second set of papers, or in the case of the Households, Work and

Flexibility (HWF) project presented by Barbara Haas and Claire Wallace (2004) in the third set of papers.

### **The plasticity of an evolutive research design**

The heavy investment needed to obtain homogeneous quality of qualitative data is another experience shared by many of the projects mentioned above. It could also be seen as another aspect of how crucial it becomes to learn from the research process itself, which applies more immediately to research designs investing in in-depth, biographical and active interviews, as exemplified by European projects such as 'Social Strategies in Risk Societies' (SOSTRIS)<sup>3</sup>, OASIS (Philips and Ray, 2004), SocCare and 'Mobility and Progression in Science Careers' (MOBISC<sup>4</sup>). Building trust with respondents and giving them space for more agency (Fontana and Frey, 1998; Holstein and Gubrium, 1988; Gilbert, 1993) is the only known way to elicit their spontaneous narratives and to invite rich and spontaneous identity-oriented accounts.

From another perspective, what seems to emerge from the experience of these projects is that, in cross-national research, the difference is not so clear cut as is usually supposed between *mondes sociaux* and *catégories de situation*, as used by Daniel Bertaux (1999). Studying the life trajectories of lone mothers or of 'double-front carers' (SocCare), the professionalisation trajectories of nurses (Eyers, 2004) or the emergence of social capital in conjunction with community leaders (Evans, 2004) ultimately entails the same ground rules on the part of the researcher, requiring her/him to describe faithfully the 'finite province of meaning' into which the respondent introduced him/her, and which varies from one country to another. Such difference in quality has to be recognised in respondents' words as a richness and assumes a special status (Demazière and Dubar, 2000, p. 5), irrespective of whether we are collecting complete life histories, life stories or only biographical materials (Denzin, 1970; Atkinson, 1998; Olagnero, 2004), as is often the case.

All this requires investment in developing a similar sensitivity on the part of national teams, using whatever means possible. In the SocCare project, for instance, considerable time was productively devoted to discussing the formulation of the interview guides and frames of analysis for each data collection wave (Kröger, 2001), even if they were *de facto* adapted subsequently to take account of national contexts and the different research approaches of the partners. To a certain extent, in the long run, these discussions produced a real convergence in the way the tools were used, enabling different disciplinary and academic approaches to be combined.

This is another good reason for recognising a firmer scientific citizenship in the plastic evolution of research designs on the basis of experience, instead of imposing rigid timetables that underestimate the amount of time needed as a resource for qualitative studies. Otherwise, we are likely to see a growing tendency, which has already begun, towards case studies and two-country studies (Büchs, 2003; Eyers, 2004; Whiteside, 2004) as the only means for managing complexity.

This does not prevent case studies or two-country studies from achieving very interesting results, especially when the same respectful and constructivist attitude described here is adopted towards the specificities of the local world of meaning, as illustrated by Noël Whiteside (2004) in the second set of papers in the series. In particular, this study also shows perfectly how the same 'learning' attitude can apply equally well to secondary data collection as to narrative interviews.

### Controlling for agency

It is worth noting, however, that too strict a parallelism has probably been hypothesised in most of the literature between non-directivity, non-structuration and non-standardisation of interview guides. It is probably true that, at the one extreme, a true life history has to begin by a single launching question (*consigne de départ*), which is non-structured, non standardised and as non-directive as possible, and that, at the other extreme, a questionnaire may be entirely pre-structured, directive and standardised. Neither extreme is without its dangers (Bertaux, 1999) and, between the two, different combinations of standardisation, structuration and directivity are probably useful for different purposes. In particular, the aim of granting a non-directive and truly interactive exchange, with freedom to treat different problems in the order in which the respondent experiences them as relevant, does not necessarily involve relinquishing the careful formulation of gentle non-intrusive questions. The interviewer has to be free to adapt her/his questions according to how the interaction unfolds, or not to ask them at all if doing so would risk stopping the flow of natural communication that must be sustained and protected at all costs. But why should roughly improvised questions be superior? Why has semi-structured interviewing gained such pre-eminence today? In fact, open questions by themselves are no guarantee of agency if their order and formulation are rigid: a semi-structured interview is often misrepresented as a sort of middle way leading to a qualitative understanding (Eyers, 2004; Phillips and Ray, 2004). We would probably be well advised to invest much more effort in monitoring respondents' space for agency and autonomy.

It is possible to define a scale of indicators of autonomous reactions, assuming responsibility on the part of the interviewees (Trifiletti, 1999). A reformulation of the scale used in the SocCare project provides a grading from minimum to maximum, involving the following components as indicators of a growing degree of autonomy:

1. The respondent taking an 'exit', or escape route, if particular questions are not seen as relevant to what is being discussed due to interviewer error, resulting in the respondent resisting probes or attempting reformulation.
2. The ability to deal softly with questions using pre-structured alternatives, in which the respondent elucidates the reasons for the choices made.
3. Opposing a relaunch probe.
4. Breaking the question-answer sequence or re-opening a topic that has already been 'closed'.
5. The formulation of 'instructions' for the interviewer, which s/he should find useful in the future (Schwartz and Jacobs, 1987, p. 283).
6. The real, non-ritualistic addition of a topic supplied in answer to the final question: 'Is there anything you would like to add?'
7. The formulation of a reflective account of the whole interview.
8. The free choice of an episode from the past illustrating a point raised by the respondent.
9. A highly visible and explicit change in the narrative plot in answer to a question at any point of the interview.
10. The formulation of views on the success of the interview, with completely autonomous turn-taking.

More often than we think, such awareness of the impact or efficacy of the discursive instrument, based on the reactions of the interviewee can be taken as an indicator of

how the communication is progressing, since many of her/his textual indications consist of clear corrective feed-back, which is too often not pursued, as it would be in natural interaction.

### **From research design towards implementation**

Although it is not possible to draw any definitive conclusions, three more general points can usefully be underlined. Firstly, a common aspect that can be detected in different research experiences is the need to grant more space to complexity, contradictory aspects, mixed and intermediate forms of phenomena that only a faithful attitude to local contexts is able to discern. It is not by chance that many of the papers in the series were based on a frank deconstruction of very general concepts, whose many locally constructed meanings needed to be distinguished (Vobruba; 2003; Barbier, 2004; Haas and Wallace, 2004; Whiteside, 2004). Nor was it by chance that so many case studies were involved, which was definitely not compatible with the strict work-package logic mentioned above.

Secondly and by contrast, the data analysis phase still shows no clear sign of developing in the direction of a correspondingly flexible design. In the projects that utilised interdisciplinary research teams, this seemed to ensue as a consequence of the need to find a common language to connect them. In SocCare, for instance, national teams had different representations of sociologists and policy analysts, and the debate often focused simply on how to find a footing for the analysis of our rich, subjective data. A similar effect can also be noted in other projects. Even if many projects are starting to make use of computer-assisted packages (Winmax, Atlas/ti, N.Vivo) to support the phase of analysis, not many of them really follow a truly inductive analysis design. Again, lack of time often results in the open coding phase being 'closed' too hastily. Adding new emerging categories to the coding list (Dey, 1993) is usually avoided because it means recoding all items right from the beginning, and not enough attention is devoted to 'negative' cases, moving away from the identified patterns of variation (Coffey and Atkinson, 1996). All too often the pressing deadline for a report leads to the postponement of a 'more serious' analysis to a future date by when the research team will probably have dispersed.

Thirdly, the more research teams try to investigate subjective meanings and to reflect on their strength of conviction and discourse formulation, the more respondents become stakeholders themselves, and the more their involvement needs to be framed by a serious ethical concern. This feature, which is intrinsic to all qualitative traditions from the outset is, to some extent, exacerbated in the specific case with which we are dealing: narrative negotiation formulated in the interactive context of the interview as first-person accounts of experience, that can be chosen, extrapolated and offered for the consideration of policy makers. The RESPECT project (Iphofen *et al.*, 2004), reported in the fifth set of papers, is a clear example of this emerging requirement, and the proposal for an auto-code could prove to be particularly useful, if this new field of confrontation between researchers and policy makers about qualitative results is to gain ground. However, sensitive researchers need demonstrate much greater loyalty in their commitment towards their informants than might be achieved through regulation. Due to their personal involvement in understanding all-too-human considerations and conditions of life, they usually do.

## Notes

1. The SocCare project was carried out between 2000-03 under Framework Programme 5. Full details are available on the project website: <http://www.uta.fi/laitokset/sospol/soccare/>
2. The project entitled 'Providing Integrated Health and Social Care for Older Persons: issues problems and solutions' (Procare) was co-ordinated by Kai Lechsering under Framework Programme 5, under the key action on 'The Ageing Population and Disabilities', 2002-04. Further details are available on the project website: <http://www.euro.centre.org/procare>
3. The SOSTRIS project was carried out between 1996-99 under Framework Programme 3 (see Chamberlayne *et al.*, 2000).
4. The MOBISC project was co-ordinated by Louise Ackers under the Fifth Action Programme relating to the Community Framework Strategy on Gender Equality, 2001-05.

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## **8. Researching the Transformation of European Social Policy Agendas**

***Svanaug Fjaer***

The literature on Europeanisation and new governance has grown considerably in recent years. The papers by Steen Mangen and by Judith Clifton and Ana Guillén show that academic research into the transformation of European social policy agendas is actively developing theoretical perspectives and useful conceptualisations of the processes involved.

Research has demonstrated the importance of European co-operation in formulating drug policy and the interest of examining the ways in which national civil services handle this new arena for co-operation (Fjær 2000). However, drug policy has some special features that make it different from social policy in general. The inherent control dimension means that co-operation between police forces and customs services in member states is essential. EU co-operation in these areas has, therefore, been much stronger than in social policy. National drug policy is also based on a number of international conventions, which have resulted in a certain amount of harmonisation of the legal basis between different countries.

To make sense of European co-operation and the process of Europeanisation of social and welfare policies we need to bear in mind the different contexts that are involved, including the historical background, the different levels of governance, from local upwards, and the special features and characteristics within the topic being studied. Both Mangen and Clifton and Guillén show clearly that they are aware of this complexity. However, if we are not to become totally lost in empirical details, we need to develop conceptualisations and theoretical understandings of this strange process.

It is a demanding task to study changes in attitudes, values and expectations concerning the state in the social policy field. In one way or another, over time, the European project influences our view of the state and our identity as citizens. In his paper, Mangen examines the use of the term 'cogmotion' in conceptualising the cognitive and emotional elements in our thinking about the role of the state. He argues that not only cognitive but also emotional dimensions impact on the way citizens feel about the integration process, and play a role in the evolution of professional and administrative cultures. The authors cited by Mangen may, however, be less concerned with the 'emotional dimension' than he suggests. Rather, it could be argued that a 'normative' dimension is at work. When we take a stand or change our view about the fundamental reshaping of relations between states, markets and civil societies, we are talking about basic norms and values. Questions about our expectations of the state and our reflections about ourselves as citizens are not best described as emotional; they are normative, and they are institutionalised in a social and structural context.

So, while the elaboration of different theoretical perspectives is useful and informative, Mangen's conclusion that they illustrate the emotional dimension in a new European identity is open to debate. Again, we would argue that they are theories contributing to the understanding of the structural dimensions that form our identities, preferences and values.

Study of European drug co-operation has clearly shown that the impact of the national level as a source of institutional values cannot be underestimated, and that cognitive elements often constitute the hard core of EU regulation and integration in practice. The national level supplies institutional support for EU-level policy. One important reason why the EU system works at all is that national experts and national civil servants commit themselves to carrying out the tasks they are given at EU level. The source of this commitment is mainly manifested at the national level, which becomes the framework for compliance even in situations where experts find European co-operation to be a waste of time and money; not least when they have the experience of handling new roles compared with those with which they were previously operating (Fjær, 2001).

Several authors have tried to conceptualise the process involved, which is neither 'positive integration' through harmonisation of laws nor 'negative integration' through liberating markets. Christoph Knill and Dirk Lehmkuhl (1999) have developed the term 'framing' integration. The establishment of principles for common measurements, and the reporting of information and data marked a significant development in the drugs field. The setting up of the European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction was the most important step in creating a social (and health) policy on drugs within the framework of the EU. It represented real cognitive co-operation with implications beyond simply co-operation in the collection of data, and it fits neatly into Knill and Lehmkuhl's (1999) description of integration through other, mainly cognitive, means. Christoph Knill and Andrea Lenschow (2003, p. 3) have developed this perspective further and describe how these soft structures function as enabling mechanisms for co-operation and learning among national policy makers: 'The regulatory impact of this approach rests on the dissemination of best practice and the provision of incentives (peer review) rather than legal obligation and control.'

The cognitive implications are also important when the concept of public services is replaced by the term 'services of general interest', described by Clifton and Guillén in their paper. This change has political and practical consequences. The paper deals primarily with how we should understand the implications of a transformation whereby social services are suddenly organised under the same heading as the supply of electricity and other industries that were previously operated as public services. How should these normative, cognitive and organisational changes be studied? In the analysis of the forces at work, Clifton and Guillén refer to policy studies with top-down or bottom-up perspectives. It is very difficult to track influences that are either top-down or bottom-up in many of the policy areas within the EU. We would argue that it is more useful to try and understand European co-operation as a genuinely multi-level process, where institutional structures at every level are the basis of the principles for action and policy outcomes. The implications for cognition of what is a good social service, and what the role of the state should be in delivering it, form the hard core of cognitive and normative change.

It is extremely important for researchers to maintain a critical distance from these policy processes. 'Framing' mechanisms are very much in favour of using expertise and all kinds of research methods in the implementation of policy. Research becomes a factor in the policy making process. We can easily get into a situation where bureaucratic rationality dominates independent research. Sometimes, it is necessary for us to ask simple questions about why we are here and what should be the aim of our work? Is it to contribute to good management or is it to develop scientific evidence

or knowledge? A problem often arises when researchers have to become involved in a kind of negotiation process, which frequently happens in international co-operation. In this sense, developing common measurements can become a highly political activity. When we are dealing with the cognitive dimension in our research activities, we need to be aware that 'soft' measures really can produce 'hard' consequences.

An institutional perspective has much to offer in the study of cognitive changes and European co-operation. It is not emotions that govern us but norms and values, which are institutionalised in the setting in which we operate. If we want to understand more about the Europeanisation process, we need to ask, for example, about role prescriptions and ideology among national civil servants and how the separation of work between the political and administrative systems has traditionally been operated at national level. My own scepticism about the usefulness of delving more deeply into the policy-making processes at the top EU-level has much to do with the importance that can be attached to looking for identification and identity rather than interests when these processes are being studied.

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## 9. Cognitive and Emotional Dimensions in Researching the Transformation of the Welfare Agenda

Steen Mangen

*A common concern of this series of papers has been the transformation of what has been – varyingly – the conventional role of the ‘guarantor state’. The papers have emphasised the need for new forms of regulation, not a surrender of state responsibility. The rapidly evolving range of pressing welfare issues means that the state has no option but to function as the key overseer of what is increasingly less a system, more a ‘complex’. Central to this reform process are both cognitive and emotional elements: the way we think and feel about the state and its transforming imperative to act in guaranteeing the rights of social citizenship in the ‘new governance of welfare’. The two elements impact on discourses relating to convergence and ‘Europeanisation’; thus, it is indispensable to our understanding of the way EU citizens think and feel about the integration project. Moreover, it crucially shapes our evolving individual and collective identities as citizens. While ‘cognitive Europeanisation’ has been covered fairly extensively in the series and elsewhere, it is argued that affective aspects have been relatively marginalised in cross-national research, although papers in the series that break the mould are cited. In diverse ways, cognitive and emotional factors are also at play in evolving professional and administrative cultures and in the styles adopted in relations with service users. Such cross-national disparities raise issues about the functional equivalence of the provider–recipient nexus in different national contexts. These factors have relevance not only for ‘collegiality’ but also for ‘cultural hegemony’ in the research act.*

The aim of this paper is to draw on some of the central conclusions of the five sets of papers in the series as they relate to cognitive and emotional aspects of the welfare agenda in its current transformation. Qualitative aspects of social protection performance are its main focus, given the context in which mature European welfare states are, to varying degrees, surrendering roles as ‘guarantor’ in favour of ‘enabler’ or ‘contractor’. Taking the previous presentations as a departure point, a potential research agenda is proposed that addresses the ‘new governance’ of welfare, convergence and ‘Europeanisation’, challenges for administrative and professional cultures and their interventions with service users, and, briefly, the management of cross-national research.

### **Social policy and ‘new governance’**

In one way or another, the cognitive and emotional concepts run through part of any future cross-national agenda. Gunnar Schuppert (2004), among others, presents a compelling argument that a critical aspect of this enterprise must equally incorporate the emotions as well as the cognitive dimension in welfare discourses; their interactive effect he tentatively terms ‘cogmotion’<sup>1</sup>. For Schuppert (2004) understanding the changes in how we think and feel about the state and its revised welfare imperative to act is an urgent research task contributing to what for him is the normative ‘positive

mission' to create an effective 'cooperative state', appropriate for what is a radically transformed phase of pluralism; certainly one rendering traditional inward-looking corporatist responses redundant. It is a problematic that requires re-examination of the notion of the 'guarantor state' in terms of evolving legal rights, administrative structures and vertical and horizontal partnership, implying new means of intervention and new understandings of subsidiarity. Reinvesting research effort in the emotional dimensions of the welfare state would go some way to redressing the balance arising from an over-reliance on rational choice perspectives<sup>2</sup>. The emotional range would need to be wide in encompassing negative feelings potentially arising from the stress individuals experience in negotiating the new risks emanating from the transformation of social policy through to a profound sense of empowerment that could be a product of stimulating community participation in the planning, design and delivery of services or through social inclusion programmes. Such an integration would make for a challenging agenda, particularly when having also to manage the cross-national problematic, not least in relation to cross-cultural issues and the nature of citizens' relationships with specific welfare systems. While cognitive aspects of popular interpretations of the welfare state are well represented at various points in this series of papers, the emotional dimension remains an under-explored area in cross-national research, and one ripe for deeper exploration at several levels. This being said, some of the earlier papers did touch on these issues: one – perhaps the more tangential – is that by Noël Whiteside (2004) on public-private partnerships in historical perspective, exploiting the benefits of detailed documentary investigation, in this case in relation to British and French pensions policies; another by Mel Evans (2004) in the same issue of papers – more centrally – concerned the role of social capital and the social economy. Of relevance, too, are the papers which focused on client-centred research, especially those adopting the child as the principal respondent, all in the fourth issue of papers: the Portuguese interview-based study of poverty by Amélia Bastos (2004); the use of video as an interview medium among a multi-cultural sample of schoolchildren in Britain by Julia Brannen (2004); and the review of the impact on young children of measures targeting parents to promote reconciliation of work and family life by Fred Deven and Valérie Carrette (2004).

Fundamental to this perspective would be a deeper examination of how interactive differences of culture and institutional arrangements, among other factors, significantly structure the way Europe's citizens think and feel about the quality of social citizenship that is being delivered. One element, of course, is the social construction of welfare discourse, bringing to mind Susanne MacGregor's (1992) argument in an earlier series of these papers about the use of seductive vocabulary in articulating welfare debates, particularly in shaping different expectations cross-nationally of the appropriate role of the state in social policy. What we have been witnessing is a transformation of the 'emotional' rhetoric in northern Europe, whereby the state is surrendering a primary function as 'nurturing parent' (associated with childhood and dependence) to that of the tougher 'enabling parent' (associated with adolescence), fostering greater self-reliance and independence. Admittedly, in southern Europe, the 'state as parent' was traditionally more contingent, manifestly favouring some of its members over others. If there is any convergence in social policy in Europe, it lies in no small way in the dispatch of the 'over-indulgent parenting' of the 'nanny state', whose product, it is argued, created chronic passivity and 'infantilising' welfare dependency. It appears, then, that as welfare states mature, we must all grow up.

One area for future exploration, then, would be the impact of cross-national differences at the cognitive and emotional level in socio-economic transformation and political legitimation: if – varyingly – mature European welfare states are no longer perceived as so nurturing, what are the consequences in terms of popular feelings of loyalty to the state. While governments have embarked on teaching their electorates to expect less from the state (for example Paul Pierson, 1994) – a new welfare *Realpolitik* if you like – Eurobarometer and other surveys still point to differences in cross-national popular attitudes with regard to the degree people subscribe to the validity of state-centred welfare solutions. Thus, what is at play throughout Europe – albeit at varying speeds – is a long-term realignment of welfare settlements. This embraces factors like the balance between solidarity claims, contributory entitlements and personal risk management that is fundamentally reshaping relations between states, markets and civil societies. Cross-nationally, research approaches of this kind may present the challenge of fresh insights into differential changes in popular understandings of solidarities, as well as the broader, socially-constituted relations of dependency and reciprocity, social valorisation and associated social core-peripheral effects that contribute much to our notion of identity.

Here the writings of Paul Hoggett (2000b), Rob Goffee and Gareth Jones (1998) and Fiona Williams (2000) could add new dimensions to comparative social policy research, not least in our interpretations of systemic differences in European social protection between traditions of universal and corporate solidarity. Hoggett, in attempting to map the emotional dimension of the British welfare state, proposes an analytical framework contrasting particularistic reciprocity and social networks predicated on what he terms ‘weak trust’ with universal reciprocity based on ‘strong trust networks’ sustained in part by an extensive state intervention. From a similar perspective, Goffee and Jones propose a two-dimensional model comparing, on one axis, high–low sociability systems (where, for example, the latter’s primary orientation is to ‘natural networks’ of choice or inheritance, like the family, and where there is a high ‘spontaneous’ sharing of goals) and, on the other, high–low solidarity systems (the former strong on public structures with codified and formally negotiated goals and functions and strongly rooted in a ‘Titmussian’ notion of the ‘reciprocity of the stranger’). Goffee and Jones argue that such a schema elucidates understandings of the nature of collaboration (intimately networked, mercenary, fragmented, and communal, the latter requiring a high level of sociability and solidarity), each of which has its own reward system. This offers a profitable insight, assisting interpretations of the varying ‘partnership’ styles of governance of social policy that are now progressively *de rigueur* in Europe.

A connected issue – of increasing importance in cross-national investigation – is how different ‘regimes’ afford ‘voice’ to their populations. Williams (2000), from a British perspective – but one that could be expanded – distinguishes between ‘new right consumerism’, ‘new labour enlightened consumerism’ and the ‘new politics of welfare’ privileging active citizens able to articulate new claims. Significantly, she locates her analysis within the broad cognitive and affective remit<sup>3</sup> by drawing on the work of Glenn Drover and Patrick Kerans (1993), who identify three key ‘stakes’: identity, resources and relations. She argues that rapidly evolving social transformations inculcating a sense of multiple identity challenge the traditional welfare systems based on the territoriality of the nation state: simply put, as individuals we are no longer so territorially bounded. This latter point provides a convenient bridge to changing

cognitive and emotional dynamics and social citizenship that some argue represents a strong Europeanisation or 'convergence' effect.

### **Convergence, globalisation, Europeanisation**

Since Ana Guillén takes up these issues in greater detail in her paper, comments here are confined to aspects of convergence, globalisation and Europeanisation that impact on cognition and emotion, whether in terms of professional or popular responses. It is important to remind ourselves that convergence is not the same as a qualitative Europeanisation, something that Ana Guillén and Santiago Álvarez (2004) term cognitive Europeanisation. This is a significant point in terms of implications for further investigative work in the broad area combining the two interactive dimensions being discussed here. Although in quantitative terms, EU member states in the past 20 or so years have not displayed strong converging trends, at least in terms of aggregate welfare outlays, something that Denis Bouget (2003a), in a particularly lucid analysis of the problems and ambiguity of quantitative analysis, addressed in the first issue of papers (see also Bouget, 2003b). Nonetheless, to varying degrees depending on the specific issue, there is an appreciably shared – Europeanising – perception of social problems and, more importantly, attitudes to their resolution. Clearly, if this substantial degree of cognitive Europeanisation were not available, procedures like the open method of co-ordination (OMC) would not stand a chance, even though it seems to have garnered, at best, mixed results so far, particularly among countries that see themselves as 'policy leaders', a point made by Nick Clark in comments on Bouget's paper (see also Tony Gore, 2004). Nonetheless, OMC has a potential in functioning as a prime instrument of Europeanisation, and not only at the cognitive level. In this, it is more likely to continue the trend of incremental, integrationist rather than short-term, radically 'transformative' impact. Indeed, several contributors, especially Milena Büchs (2003), have emphasised the progressive normative impact on professional and administrative cultures of OMC's benchmarking and 'naming and shaming'. This line of argument is broadly supported by Jeanie Bukowski *et al.* (2003) who, among other things, attempt to assess the effect of the ongoing impact of Europeanisation on what they refer to as institutional identities.

Convergence embraces structures, process and performance, making plenty of room for divergences to occur within the overall trend; and measurement of degree is everything. Several of the papers criticised the general assumption in much of the literature of a stable uni-directional situation. However, Bouget (2003a) did raise the question of whether convergence was essentially a 'Darwinian' impulse: where policy models implying the survival of the economic fittest will prevail. In this regard, he speculated whether convergence through policy borrowing was 'cheaper' than innovation. Nonetheless, he did conclude that, given the interplay of professional and institutional cultures, a contextually-dependent 'mirroring' is a more typical effect than a direct 'transplant'. The work of Stephen Ward (2000) seems pertinent here: his empirical analysis of urban planning indicates that policy borrowing produces the strongest incidence among nearest neighbours, typically bringing forward what might, in any event, have occurred. Even here, undiluted replication was rare. Furthermore, Ana Guillén has insisted on the primacy of context. Citing the pervasive effects of renewal in all its aspects during the Spanish transition, she argued that professional and institutional cultural reform created spaces for innovation, rather than mere

'mirroring'. In this, she is supported by the work of Ulrike Götting and Stephan Lessenich (1999) who, in a comparative study of the impact of democratic transition on Spain and Hungary, privilege what they term a *bricolage* of old and new, borrowed and radical in departure.

Both Georg Vobruba (2003) and Nick Manning (2003) in the first set of papers examined the differential impacts of the double or even triple 'shock' of globalisation and Europeanisation (and democratisation) on European societies. Vobruba insists that, despite evident trends in convergence, there is a continuing impact of path dependencies, although these vary over space and sector. In this, he is supported by Denis Bouget (2003a), who insists that path dependency needs to be unravelled, his argument being that it implied a non-convergent pattern rather than increasing divergence of institutional arrangements. Vobruba (2003) proposes a measurement of globalisation by applying a two-dimensional model: along a short-term–long-term axis and a winners–losers axis. Public discourse for him has rightly focused on losers, whether countries as a whole, or certain social groups within them. Arguing largely from a normative perspective, he proposes social efficiency is served though a continued high investment in the welfare state to offer bridging subsidies for those who are temporarily losers and longer-term compensation for those who are chronically disadvantaged, and whose compliance is perceived as indispensable in upholding widespread popular endorsement of policy lines. This could offer a new departure in cross-national research, in part by disaggregating differential responses of groups in various welfare regimes seeking to defend their positions and their impact on policy resolution. Manning (2003) examines the impact of social transformation and path-breaking welfare policy transfers between west and east. Again, he stresses spatial and sectoral as well as social differential impacts. Reporting on multi-method approaches that incorporate both case studies and a variety of survey techniques, he reviews analysis drawing on actor network and policy network theories. To test the consistency of transformation impact, he suggests that greater methodological attention should be paid to the evolving predicaments of women and children in various countries in Central and Eastern Europe. He concludes that path dependency is established in diverse socio-political situations and, therefore, cross-national measures of it must take into account a broader range of variables than has been conventional, or perhaps even manageable, so far: among others, these would include size of country and its cultural homogeneity or heterogeneity, the historical length of the policy line in distinct sectors, and the cumulative strength of the direction and scope of specific reforms.

The notion of Europeanisation is critical to our evolving individual and collective identities, and is at play in shaping our understanding of our status as social citizens. One area of research that could be developed further, despite its problematic use in cross-national research, may be the use of the vignette in assessing Europeanisation/convergence impacts on specific population groups or household types. Here, we can cite the work of Thomas Faist (2001), who interprets policy evolution as producing what he terms a 'nested' citizenship, where the rights of social citizenship exist at various levels within an intricate network of overlapping competences. From a similar perspective, Monica Threlfall (2003) examines policy arenas at EU level in terms of their harmonised or converging impact. On the whole, she identifies social security as a 'weakly approximated' sector. Although in this series only Ingrid Evers (2004) exploited the method, in earlier series of papers, the vignette was presented in various

forms, for example in qualitative analyses of social worker responses to presenting problems and qualitative applications with regard to 'typical households' and the impact of family policy and anti-social exclusion measures. Following Threlfall (2003), EU freedom of movement social security stipulations, primarily determined as they are by regulation, seem eminently suitable, particularly with regard to the entitlements of those household forms that do not entirely conform to implicit stereotypes assumed by procedures. In the absence of what we used to term the 'thirteenth state' solution, the unintended/unforeseen consequences, far from promoting 'nested citizenship' and European identity, may for some groups both cognitively and emotionally serve to reinforce the perception of Social Europe as primarily an instrument of coercion. In part, such negative consequences flow from the lack of co-ordination between changes in stipulations among the member states. Pension reform is a case in point. Individual countries have been independently amending regulations (for example changes in statutory retirement age or early retirement provisions) which, rather than producing converging rights for those recipients whose total entitlements derive from compulsory contributions made in several member states (from which they cannot contract out), impose confusing diversity within their pensions portfolios.

### **Professional and institutional cultures**

In one way or another, several of the papers in the series raised the issue of cognition and the affect, and their interactive impact on motivation for both professions and clients. In general, the concern was directed towards the question of functional equivalence in professional and administrative cultures in 'embedded' national contexts. These factors have relevance, not only for interpretations of 'collegiality' but also for 'cultural hegemony' in the research act, alluded to with varying degrees of diplomacy by many contributors. They also must be brought to bear in understanding different motivations in new forms of governance represented by differential implementation in Europe of 'new public management in inter-professional relations and professional-client relations, not least in the proletarianising and alienating effects that might ensue through what Hoggett (2000a) terms the 'new formalisation' of relations. For him, this arises from the culture of audit and externally imposed performance-related rewards that may constrain the vital emotional content between professionals and users that is essential for the development of both and for the institutions in which they interact. A critical concept here that requires greater exploration in cross-national contexts is 'emotional intelligence', which, as Malcolm Higgs and Mary McGuire (2001) insist, provides the affective link between institutions, the professionals who operate within them and the clients they serve. Central to the understanding of this concept is what could be termed the political economy of trust, empathy and sustainable relationships.

Two papers in the series should be mentioned in this regard as being particularly relevant. In the fifth issue, that by Janet Harkness (2004) on cross-national health surveys stresses sub-cultural and cultural differences in propensities to disclose and to trust, which affect interactions between clients and practitioners. In the research act, this can produce serious disparities in response rates and bias in the interpretation of data. As she demonstrates, while part of this variance is due to cross-cultural divergences, within-country differences in ethnic, class-based and professional sub-cultures make for a difficult project management. Another contribution in the second

issue of papers by Judith Phillips and Mo Ray (2004) addressed the cognitive and emotional input in professional–client relations. Their five-country study of care for older people and intergenerational solidarity was one of the strongest in terms of user-centred research with regard to how families in different countries negotiate the formal and informal network of support to manage the onset of disability or illness. Other studies that should be cited here (both reported in the third set of papers), approaching discourse and the institution–client nexus at more aggregate level, were those of Jean-Claude Barbier (2004), who investigated employment precariousness and its impact in contexts that he asserted raised issues of conceptual equivalence. Within a similar orientation, Barbara Haas and Claire Wallace (2004) examined the impact of flexibility on the control of work and job satisfaction and, interestingly, tentatively proposed the concept of ‘flexibility regimes’.

Greater attention to these sorts of issues in cross-national projects could pay dividends. One area for an expanded research remit is the forms of interactive and participatory styles determining the quality of professional–client relations (‘managed’, ‘closed’ and ‘open’). Here, ‘power distance’ is likely to be the crucial variable: incorporating elements such as degree of autocratic or consultative culture, the nature of individualism and collectivism in professional decision-making, uncertainty avoidance in management styles, the risk management and time perspective. My cross-national research on urban regeneration policies and the impact of administrative and professional cultures has attempted to examine some of these factors to categorise the quality of participatory engagement (Mangen, 2004).

### **Transforming welfare agendas and the governance of research**

Within and between-country differences in practitioner, researcher and funding cultures were a key theme running through the papers in the fifth issue and are addressed in the contribution by Linda Hantrais to this volume. In applied research of the kind we have been examining, they have serious implications for multinational teamwork. At both cognitive and emotional levels investment varies substantially and includes such factors as differences in monetary and status reward structures, the importance attached to theorising as opposed to findings that are of practical value for policy implementation, and the time horizons of academics, practitioners and policy makers, who may be the principal funders. Arising from the lack of a clear model of governance of cross-national research, Ron Iphofen and his colleagues (2004) were concerned with the wider, ethical issue of who should determine standards in the research act. Some of the problems arise from the prevailing hegemony in which Anglo-Saxon perspectives of problematics are imposed on multinational teamwork. For example, Janet Harkness (2004) discussed the predominant culture in health research and, in particular, the role of international organisations such as the WHO, which have privileged Anglo-Saxon instruments that all too often fail to accommodate other respondents’ frames of reference. The Anglo-Saxon hegemony is not all due to arrogance or assertiveness: several contributors expressed their concern about the pressures from teams in the participating countries in Framework Programme projects for the Anglo-Saxon bloc to take the lead.

## Notes

1. Schuppert's use of 'cogmotion' has proved contentious among social scientists. In part, this stems from the fact that the term has already been 'captured' by human resources techniques industry where it is branded in the form of training and team-building programmes. However, other researchers feel that adopting such an approach would stretch a cross-national empirical research remit beyond the feasible. Coulson (2004), in welcoming the eschewal of purely cognitive models, concedes that researchers are divided on the issue of what constitutes an emotion and the role emotions play in behaviour. His conclusion that emotions are caused by behavioural responses to environmental events would support the case being made here for their incorporation into cross-national research of the impact of different welfare systems on the subjects affected.
2. I am indebted to my fellow editor, Susanne MacGregor, for stressing this point in subsequent discussion.
3. The interchangeable use of emotion and affect may be open to criticism since the view can be expressed that the latter is a function of ideas, whereas the former is essentially the product of individual experience.

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## 10. Electrifying or Europeanising Social Policy? Some Research Challenges

*Judith Clifton and Ana Guillén*

*This paper examines the challenges posed for the future of comparative social policy analysis in the context of the reformulation of EU welfare states. In particular, the paper takes the new concept of 'services of general interest' (SGI) as a case starting point to analyse the Europeanisation of social policy. It focuses on some of the most significant theoretical and methodological aspects that have arisen from the series with a view to setting the research agenda. The first significant problem encountered concerns disciplinary traditions: definitions of social policy tend to focus on the welfare state and pay less attention to overlapping sectors such as public services. However, the SGI paradigm cuts through the boundaries (artificially) separating public services from social services, since it aims to regulate parts of both using the same framework. Thus, researchers working on both public services and social services must pool their resources and agree on a methodological strategy to understand new changes. A second challenge is theoretical, and involves the complex task of separating out the different forces of globalisation, European convergence and Europeanisation. The paper comments on definitions of Europeanisation and raises questions about the impact of grass-roots organisations on policy change, and how these can be measured. Thirdly, the case of the SGI paradigm reflects the long-standing conflict between social and economic policy at the EU level. Less visible, but equally important, is that the tradition of consensus via formal channels of dialogue, such as the social partners and associated interest groups, has mobilised around the issues in an uneven manner (by country, region, sector). The hypothesis here is that the ways in which power is distributed have serious consequences for the policy process and outcomes.*

This paper takes the new concept of 'services of general interest' (SGI) as a starting point to analyse the Europeanisation of social policy. SGIs have been used as an ideational tool in EU policy-making circles from the mid-1990s and can be understood as a 'soft' decision-making tool at the supranational level. SGI regulation thus constitutes an important part of the emergence of a 'new governance' instrument alongside other tools such as the open method of co-ordination (OMC). This paper uses the SGI concept and its development as a prism through which to focus on some of the most significant theoretical and methodological aspects and challenges that have arisen from this series of *Cross-National Research Papers* with a view to setting the future research agenda. Indeed, the first set of papers was devoted precisely to the study and research into the impact of globalisation and European integration on social policy. The evolution of welfare states and their convergence was also taken into account. In other issues, European policies, such as the European Employment Strategy, or the place of the family and childhood in the European Social Model (issue n° 4), were discussed and assessed. Issues 2 and 5 focused on methodological aspects of comparative research and the relation between research and policy

respectively. SGIs are relevant to all these questions, not only thematically, but also because they raise interesting theoretical and methodological points.

This paper is divided into three sections. In the first, we briefly explain the SGI regulatory paradigm to set the scene. In the second, we discuss some of the main research challenges brought about by the fact that the SGI regulatory paradigm straddles two relatively separate fields of academic activity: welfare state and public services analysis. In conclusion, we discuss theoretical challenges such as the concept of Europeanisation and how it can be operationalised.

### **The SGI regulatory paradigm**

The background to the changing regulatory framework for SGIs can be located at the international level during the 1970s when political discourse and practice shifted away from the postwar Keynesian approach to a 'neoliberal' set of policy preferences hinging around privatisation, liberalisation and deregulation. This shift in political discourse has been critically analysed by many authors (Arnt Aune, 2001; Stiglitz, 2002), so no more will be said about it here. Privatisation policies, which originated in Adenauer's Germany and Pinochet's Chile, were spearheaded in the EU by Margaret Thatcher's Conservative Party during the 1980s. It was not until 1993, however, that privatisation took off in the majority of EU countries. Just at the time when privatisation started in earnest, social aspects of integration were being formally recognised in the European Community and European Union. This may at first appear contradictory, but it is logical in the sense that there was a growing recognition that, in the quest for financial and trade liberalisation, competition and privatisation, public and social services could be damaged. It was imperative, therefore, that citizens' rights to these services were protected. Pressure on Brussels came from its social partners, particularly the Centre for European Public Enterprises (CEEP) and the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC), through multiple formal mutual consultation processes, as well as through local and regional protests and conflicts in various member states (Héritier and Schmidt, 2000; Bauby, 2002; Clifton *et al.*, 2005).

These social partners called for public services to be defended at the regional or supranational level through the implementation of a framework directive and/or a Charter to guarantee a more 'positive' integration process, characterised by social inclusion (as opposed to 'negative' integration associated with the removal of trade barriers and so on). The response within the EU was gradual and, although the tendency was to remain upbeat about the benefits of competition, it was also recognised that the place of public and social services needed clearer definition and stronger protection. One key indicator of the changes came with the decision to eliminate the term 'public services' from official political discourse and replace it with the term 'services of general interest' (Clifton *et al.*, 2003). This was accompanied by a shift in the way in which public services would be regulated. The EC/EU pointed out that the 'old' term 'public service' was used in a dual and contradictory way. It referred to both the actual (usually publicly owned) enterprises, which supplied the services, and which were managed by individual member states, and the services, which all citizens had equal rights to access and enjoy. It is this latter definition that the EU now wishes to stress. The view was that the term 'service of general interest' also tended to detract attention from the issue of ownership and focused on actual goods or services. According to the EU, this mirrored the reality of its policies, which were neutral, for

instance, concerning whether a train service was provided by a privately or publicly owned firm. What mattered was that the citizens and travellers had a reliable, efficient and accessible train service.

Thus, the rather cumbersome terms 'services of general interest' and 'services of general economic interest' were introduced to replace 'public services'. These new terms are equally, if not, more, problematic than the old term 'public services'. What do these terms actually mean? Two important and overlapping concepts need to be distinguished here. 'Service of general interest' does not actually figure in the Treaty of Rome itself but was derived in Community practice from 'services of general economic interest', which does appear in the Treaty. The term 'services of general interest' is used to refer to all services that are considered to be in the general interest and, therefore, subject to specific public-service obligations. These include non-market services such as education, social protection, security and justice, as well as market services such as telecommunications and gas. Within this concept is a sub-concept, 'services of general economic interest', referring to commercial services on which specific public obligations are placed, including transport, energy and communications such as telecommunications and broadcasting. One of the problems, therefore, is that the single term 'service of general interest' refers to two overlapping, but different, sets of activities: on the one hand, to non-economic services, and on the other, to the basket of all services that affect the general interest, including services of general economic interest.

### **Challenges to research and policy**

At least two problems arise from the former understanding. A first problem is related to the way in which the SGI regulatory paradigm has emerged and the challenges this poses for the future of European social policy itself. Hitherto, EU policy towards services of general interest has been grounded in a sector-specific approach. In general, this is because the EU has more competence in certain fields, particularly the network industries (telecommunications, energy, postal services and transport), whereas, in contrast, it has relatively little or no competence in other public services such as broadcasting or social services. In the light of criticism about an *ad hoc* and un-homogenous policy approach to these services, the EU has put forward two alternative solutions. Firstly, 'services of general interest' could be treated as a homogenous whole by seeking to advance the core characteristics of all of these services, such as the provision of a universal service, continuity, quality of service, affordability and user and consumer protection. The advantage of this proposition is that it should increase the consistency of approach; hence our title 'Electrifying social services', since an industrial network service framework would be forged to regulate very different services.

Another problem with the 'catch-all' approach is that the basic features common to all 'services of general interest' may be so vague as to require detailed add-ons, thus defeating the principle of a single rule. The second option is that EU policy could continue to treat the services according to sector. If the first option were chosen, the definition of 'services of general interest' would need quite fundamental adjustment, since the existing definition is heavily biased towards the network industries. For this purpose, it is of crucial importance to clarify what is distinctive about social services as opposed to other public services.

Clarification is needed not only in academic terms, but also in practical terms, given the impact that broadly shared definitions by populations and policy makers may have on policy design and results. Can social services be considered as similar to gas or electricity supply services? In most European welfare states, social services have tended to become de-commodified, so that their separation from market forces has meant their loss of a market price, at least at the point of use. Obviously, citizens still pay taxes and social contributions in order to finance public social policies. Conversely, citizens pay for energy or transport services according to their consumption levels. In the best case, some of the 'economic services' provided by the network industries are partially subsidised by public authorities for certain disadvantaged social groups, such as the cross-subsidisation of telephone services. However, not all social services completed the process of de-commodification, not even at the apex of the Golden Age. Moreover, some areas of former public social policies have been privatised in major traditional welfare states. In other cases, the splitting of the traditional functions of the welfare state (financing, purchasing, providing) means that increasing numbers of citizens have to make a payment out of their own pockets when using a specific public social service, thus relating payment to the level of consumption. In practice, the differences are starting to become blurred. Debates are emerging in the policy arena as to whether specific services, such as housing, fit best as a service of general interest or as a service of general economic interest (CECODHAS, 2003). Furthermore, since the beginning of the 1990s, emphasis in the field of public social policy has been placed not only on the attainment of equity among citizens but also on efficiency, so that cost-control measures have been applied in most areas of the social protection sphere. Nonetheless, one could argue that what is still distinct about social protection policies is that they are aimed at producing redistributive results and that the accent on equity is much more intense than in other services. This sets them apart from gas or electricity. Therefore, both in academic and (European) political terms, it is of crucial importance that they are treated separately from other services of general interest.

### **Conceptualising the Europeanisation of welfare**

A second substantial challenge has already been signalled by authors writing in the field of the Europeanisation of public policy (Radaelli, 2003; Levi-Faur, 2004). When attempting to ascribe the origins of change in public policy in the European Union, Radaelli (2003) has indicated the tendency to assume that Europe is the origin of change, rather than proving (by including non-European cases for instance) that Europe is the force for change rather than technological or other global forces.

At the same time, the concept of Europeanisation, as opposed to European integration or convergence, is still relatively new, and scholars are still in the early stages of developing models to enable us to 'measure' it (Radaelli, 2003). Disagreement is found about the definition of Europeanisation, even between co-editors such as Kevin Featherstone and Claudio Radaelli (2003). Europeanisation is above all a process rather than an outcome, which may, or may not, produce certain consequences or outcomes, such as greater integration, harmonisation or convergence. Europeanisation should, therefore, be understood as a process that produces highly asymmetrical, divergent and often transitory, reversible results. Furthermore, differences exist in the ways in which authors understand and deploy the

concept. They are important since they lead to divergent findings. One of the key differences in the existing models of Europeanisation – put crudely – is whether a ‘bottom-up’ or ‘top-down’ focus is emphasised. Authors such as Tanja Börzel (1999, 2002), and Tanja Börzel and Thomas Risse (2000) focus more on what happens once power has been transferred to Brussels, and how the domestic policy areas become increasingly subject to European policy making. In this conceptualisation, the focus is on the ‘misfit’ (or the inconvenience or incompatibility) between European-level processes, policies and institutions, and domestic-level processes, policies and institutions. The degree of fit or misfit constitutes adaptational pressures, which are a necessary, but not sufficient, condition for change. Other authors such as Ana Guillén and Bruno Palier (2004) have attempted to operationalise the process of Europeanisation when evaluating the influence of adaptational pressures stemming from the European Social Model on particular national and sub-national settings. In their view, the influence of the EU can be both direct and indirect. The first comprises core legislation such as directives and the *acquis*, the construction of the single market and Economic and Monetary Union. The second includes soft legislation (recommendations, white papers, OMC, SGIs) and structural and cohesion funds. But indirect influence can be ascertained also at the cognitive level: in changes in broadly shared perceptions about social policies and the way to recalibrate them. This is why evidence of EU influence should be researched in two different policy dimensions so as not to lose part of the picture: namely on policy procedures and substance. Procedures are related to changes in policy tools, in the structure of policy making, and in policy actors and/or their roles. Influence on the substance of policies can be indicated by changes in coverage and entitlements, financing and expenditure arrangements, and management of policies. Even when no impact may be ascertained at the level of policy substance, changes in procedures may exist and be relevant.

Radaelli (2003) warns against accepting a wholly ‘top-down’ model of Europeanisation, since this assumes a kind of managerial chain-of-command logic, creating an artificial separation between processes that are interlinked. A ‘top-down’ model tends to conceptualise the EU as a static, fixed entity, rather than one which is in a continual process of renegotiation, bargaining, diffusion, and conflict between the local, regional, national and supranational levels. Since EU policy is not a mysterious *deus ex machina*, but an arena characterised by continual flux, this needs to be incorporated into the model of Europeanisation. Another problem of an over-mechanical ‘top-down’ approach is that, if researchers are looking for evidence of ‘influences from Europe’, but do not use rival, alternative hypotheses, they are in danger of reifying Europeanisation without having necessarily located causality. The questions are: Has Europe been the cause for change and, if so, to what extent, and in which directions have the influences flowed?

A ‘top-down’ approach should be supplemented with a ‘bottom-up’ perspective if we want to avoid reification. It is, therefore, important to look at the individual and institutional choices made in domestic politics. The analysis must be ‘inside-out’, not just ‘outside-in’; for instance, we must take account of pressure groups and public opinion from the local to supranational level and *vice versa*. While observers can research with relative ease the mutual consultation processes among the policy-making elite (including the social partners), the question needs to be answered: Is this really bottom-up analysis, or do we need to go ‘more deeply’ into the policy-making process and analyse the impact of interest groups and other grass-roots

organisations? From the politics and governance point of view at EU level, are the OMC and SGIs really fostering the 'bottom-up' road to decision-making?

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