Cross-National Research Papers

Seventh Series:

European Cross-National Research and Policy

2. The Impact of Methodological Approaches to the Study of Welfare on the Policy Relevance of Findings

Edited by

Steen Mangen

Contributors

Mel Evans
Ingrid Eyers
Judith Phillips
Mo Ray
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Noël Whiteside

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Contents

List of tables and figures 3

Series editor's foreword 4

1. The impact of methodological approaches to the study of welfare on the policy relevance of findings
Steen Mangen 5

2. Towards a qualitative research design?
Rossana Trifiletti 7

3. Adapting methods: the role of social capital in the social economy
Mel Evans 12

4. Historical methods for comparing pension policies
Noël Whiteside 21

5. Comparative multi-methods approaches to the care of older people
Ingrid Eyers 30

6. Connecting research and policy: service systems and intergenerational solidarity
Judith Phillips and Mo Ray 39

Notes on contributors 50

List of Tables and Figures

Tables

3.1 The five stage approach to the social accounting process 16
3.2 Local social capital index and proxy indicators for each location 17

6.1 Characteristics of the OASIS countries 41

Figures

3.1 The relationship between social capital, social enterprise and social economy 14
5.1 Life-course threads 37

Series Editor's Foreword

The seminars on which this new series of *Cross-National Research Papers* is based are 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 maintain and build on the research of existing international teams. They are consolidating links between social science research and wider society. An important aim of the seminars is 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 address the theoretical, methodological, managerial and practical problems arising in comparative social science research projects across EU member states and candidate countries, 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 are:

- 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 are exploring 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 is funding the seminars and publications.

Linda Hantrais

1. The Impact of Methodological Approaches to the Study of Welfare on the Policy Relevance of Findings

Steen Mangen

The second of the current series of *Cross-National Research Papers* addresses a range of investigative approaches to an interrelated policy arena that is rapidly growing in significance in the EU and, indeed, far beyond: broadly, the interface between formal and informal provisions. Respecting the tradition of these publications, the first of the substantive papers sets the broader scene, this time by examining the context in which social capital may come into play in recasting post-Fordist welfare systems. Thereafter, the contributions address methodological problems of this evolving policy nexus, specifically by researching how it sustains living standards and quality of life in later life, in terms of both in-cash and in-kind support. The primary focus of this edition of papers is qualitative methods that have been applied in projects ranging from single-person, two-country to international team-led, multi-state studies. In her introductory paper, Rosanna Trifíletti sets these contributions in a wider methodological context.

The authors of this collection approach their remits largely from a historical or sociological perspective. Yet, all share the concern to emphasise a multi-method approach, albeit from different standpoints; critically, all equally reflect the firm desire to apply research methodologies in advancing ambitions to clarify practical policy resolution. In this, they seek to reinforce the benefits of investigative approaches that contribute to policy formulation and planning, implementation and evaluation of outcomes. Thereby, they subscribe to the pre-eminent enterprise of connecting dialogue and transfer of knowledge between researchers, practitioners and users, by paying attention to the conceptual, methodological, managerial, interpretive and utilisation aspects of the research act. Here, research formulation and implications for end use are paramount.

The range of methods represented in the papers demonstrates an ever-expansive ambit and ambition to refine technical tools. Equally, in the auditing and the experiences of employing them, the contributors reinforce the fact that cross-national research is a distinct field in terms of a specific problematic (not to mention managerial dimensions) that it addresses, but it is also an inchoate paradigm. While some 'progress' may be achieved in overcoming limitations on certain fronts, many others are integral to the enterprises; they are not temporary 'little local difficulties'. Given the constraints that emanate from both these considerations, most researchers opt for a 'multi-methods' strategy combining qualitative with a range of quantitative methods. They do this, not as a 'second-best coping tactic', but because they feel that it offers real dividends in terms of linking methods to the ultimate analytic act. Others insist on a more 'purist' design; for them, such a combination carries very real dangers of distilling or even losing meaning. The position taken must determine the nature and scale of the cross-national research that one is willing to undertake and, critically, the 'conceptual reach' being aiming for. Policy-related research takes place in neither a political nor an economic vacuum. For me – given the realities of present funding cultures – the 'purist' line would limit many projects to two-country, small sample investigations, which could just as easily limit an enlightened broader, generalisable cross-national understanding. Alternatively, large-scale, multi-methods investigations are often prosecuted within tight

deadlines and an agenda imposed by the funder. The frustration here is not only 'conceptual stretching', but failing to hit the 'conceptual mark' at all.

The present series of *Cross-National Research Papers* confronts these sorts of problems in a frank and collegial manner. Equally, it unambiguously seeks to contribute to the political imperative manifest in the modernisation of the European social model and wider European integration by fostering enhanced means of collaboration, dissemination, training and dialogue among an increasingly 'networked' community of those who engage in, and those who seek practical application of, cross-national research.

2. Towards a Qualitative Research Design?

Rossana Trifíletti

The contributions in this issue of *Cross-National Research Papers* use a variety of methods, among which a common feature is their application, to a greater or lesser extent, of qualitative approaches, usually within a conventional research design. They can, therefore, be examined against the background of a much broader question: the role that qualitative research methods could play in international comparative studies, if used to explore systematically the taken-for-granted assumptions found in different countries and cultures, by following the flow of what respondents infuse in their accounts. This does not imply pre-formatting any supposed map of saliences and meanings, which is the epistemological advantage of interpretive qualitative approaches in a broader sense.

A sustainable comparative path, based on such an approach, is a goal that comparative networks are seeking to achieve with generous support from European Framework Programmes, but which is still proving to be elusive, mainly for practical reasons, including the problems of co-ordination among different languages, expertise and team compositions (Mangen 1999).

At first glance, some of the studies in this collection of papers might not appear suitable for what I regard as 'truly' qualitative methods, due to the research object: for example analysis of the governance of pensions or the interplay between social economy and social capital. Topics such as these appear to be too remote from daily life for exploration according to my definition of the qualitative approach. Other subjects such as the quality of care for older people are, on the contrary, particularly suitable for qualitative methods (Chamberlayne and King, 1996; Schunk 1996; Anttonen *et al*., 2003). Paradoxically, the paper about pension policies comes closest to 'truly' qualitative methods, whereas, in my view, those on care are furthest away. The aim here is to show that the continuum of qualitative methods is founded on the overall logic of the research design, rather than on the topic of study or the adoption of individual methods. It would, for instance, have been feasible to look at what sorts of practices can be found beneath the label of 'social capital', and how its meanings change across countries. This would have shed light on native meanings in a different way, but it would have been a different type of research.

A preliminary question to be addressed by comparative researchers is whether the secondary status of a truly qualitative approach (invariably described as too costly, too time-consuming, too difficult for some national teams) has become a sort of conventional wisdom that we never seriously try to test. This seems especially discouraging when it arises in thematic areas in which a young generation of 'sensitised' students pose fresh questions and face new problems. A new sort of taken-for-granted truce would appear to have been established between qualitative and quantitative approaches, in which real contrasts and choices are blurred in a multi-method practice, whereby some minor use of qualitative technical tools is considered to be stimulating if, and only if, they are controlled for in a 'serious' quantitative-led research design.

From this point of view, the development of such a complex and articulated research agenda, as in the CONSCISE project, could be taken as a sort of paradigm to get people thinking about the merits of such conventional wisdom by setting aside, for

a moment, the interpretations that they have accumulated 'historically'. The project was organised from the outset with a very strict and complex research design, which was not only linear, divided into 'workpackages' (according to the European Commission's terminology), but also openly deductive, structured around classical phases of concept definition and agreed refinement, followed by the collection of indicators about context, and finally proceeding to conduct surveys with varying aims.

At the same time an interesting choice of a very different nature was made, which renders the research much closer to action research and, therefore, a qualitative approach: the choice to adopt the same techniques, used by, or at least known to, social enterprise managers, namely community profiling and social auditing. In themselves, these techniques are not at all qualitative; they share the logic of a complex battery of indicators and surrogates, designed to find measurable units, an objective quite distant from that of exploring diversity and spontaneous relevance. The intention was to involve local social actors on familiar ground, which is where the qualitative logic came in. Describing on-going practices was expressly undertaken to show the diversity of cultural values across contexts, embedded in the diversity of practices.

Here, another layer of sampling was introduced, which simplifies complexity in ways that it is not possible to control. For, selection means deciding, at the outset, which dimensions to include. Respondents were to belong to a sounding group that endorsed the functions of gatekeeper, discussant and 'privileged informer', together with the role of co-researcher, fitting the research phases to the specific context. From this very limited and deliberately controlled approach to context ensues the complexity, including the fact that sounding groups were not possible in every location. The research teams needed to engage effectively with the sounding group, which introduces a very important feature of the qualitative research process that it is extremely difficult to build in at the beginning in research designs: a time for learning.

None of this happens by chance, as some of the most interesting findings of the project indicate: namely that, in the end, measuring social capital is not so important as understanding how it works. Nor was local social capital so important for the emergence of social enterprises. It could very well be replaced by informal networks or wider interest groups. However, an increased awareness of the working of social capital (a sort of Hawthorne effect of the research process) can have a multiplier effect: the more social capital is focused and used, the more it grows.

A phase of learning from the research process itself, a stage of empathetic engagement, not only of the research teams, but of the teams with the research subjects, is both useful for action research and has to be legitimised as a normal prerequisite in establishing context. It grounds the reflexive quality of a respectful research process (the opposite of the 'hit and run' techniques of the worst surveys). In fact, it may force the researcher to accept diversity well beyond pre-formulated hypotheses; in other words, it may change the original research design, as happened with this project.

Another broader question raised by the paper is whether what we usually mean by 'a methodological paper' really allows an evaluation from a qualitative point of view: in other words, if we are dealing with 'experiential knowledge', we cannot evaluate it properly without considering findings at the same time. An experience-grounded research process limited to a description of a collection of technical tools, as 'scientific' conventional rules somehow prescribe, without referring to findings, cannot really

assess whether the method 'works'. Therefore, qualitative research requires an 'unlaundered' assessment of methodology in use, which has hitherto been realised only by sociologists in the US (Douglas, 1976; van Maanen, 1988). Most of the learning process, in fact, builds on errors and mistakes, which researchers often do not report.

The paper by Noël Whiteside adopts a truly constructivist approach to examine how public and private spheres of social protection have been historically constructed, although her object, the role of government, and her source, administrative archives, appear, at first glance, to be very difficult to treat using 'truly' qualitative approaches. Yet, the paper endorses the richness of a case-oriented study, as compared to variable-based studies, in Charles Ragin's terms (1987). The neatness of a two-country study helps in catching what Whiteside terms an 'equivalent diversity', that is how two similar contexts under the influence of similar exogenous factors may develop important policy divergences arising from the different roles of the state. At the same time, an historical approach offers a check on too strictly positivistic research tactics. In the end, her historical typology of the UK and France, based on archival materials, is much more complex and mobile than the classical types of welfare regimes to which we are accustomed, and which arise, in no small measure, from the work of Gøsta Esping-Andersen (1990) and his stress on continuity, through a focus on data from a particularly stable period, which he continues to draw on in later work (Esping-Andersen, 1999). Moreover, Whiteside overcomes the constraints of a classic institutionalist approach. Instead, she treats her state records as true narratives, demonstrating a sort of ethnographic sensitivity to the welfare logics embedded in administrative practices, local languages and ways of doing things and documenting them. Not only does the difference in administrative styles between the two countries constitute a problem in accessing data or, rather, in having to cope with 'sanitised' data, but it also refers back to a different way of constituting a collective memory: constructing 'common sense'. Here, a much more sociological notion of institutions is at work, where traditional behaviours, social movements and collective representations frame the policy process. Evidence may be found of this in her comment that cross-national research often involves a sort of 'misplaced concreteness', usually attributed to institutions with the same name in different countries, but constituted by divergent social practices. Such clever use of official files requires a deep 'knowledge of administrative structures', which again refers to the time for learning mentioned above.

The OASIS project provides some confirmation of the predominance of the research design over the expected results derived from a single qualitative technique. It can be argued that limiting the place of unstructured interviews in the qualitative phase, and choosing a rigid interview schedule in such a delicate and controversial matter as care for older people, which often involves working with tense or 'challenged' relations obscures half the story. In addition, it is more difficult to check the linguistic equivalence when using a rigid interview guide than if the interviews are organised around a series of topics. It is very difficult to elicit narratives from respondents using tightly structured interviews, supported by a single vignette about obligations. Instead, they provide information about normative attitudes and tend to damage the ethnographic context of the interview, as defined by Aaron Cicourel (1964).

The findings from the survey and the qualitative phase about the ambivalent attitudes of carers for older people are not contradictory, as argued in the paper, but rather definitely not comparable (Brannen, 2003, p. 17), offering proof that, in opinion

surveys, reduction of cognitive dissonance is at work, whereas in lengthier interviews respondents often manage to recount their complex experiences. More evidence that the research design prevails in the end over the best qualitative intentions can be found in the use made of a CAQDAS package in a cross-national context. The package was used to define 'a key master coding frame' in one country to be proposed to other teams. However, Winmax, like any other CAQDAS packages, should be exploited more for the opposite aim of exploring complexity and diversity in different countries in the phase of open coding (Strauss and Corbin, 1990), before closing the coding tree on the basis of a real extended comparison. It is not so much a problem of technological determinism, but rather an epistemological question: working with a closed code does not allow us to ground concepts in the richness of data, it simply reduces it to content analysis.

The paper also confirms the long gearing-up phase in which national teams have to learn to work together by addressing taken-for-granted professional backgrounds and perceptions. In this project, the co-ordinator had an especially difficult function in motivating the other teams to undertake the task. Rather than offering them a handbook written for the occasion with a prescribed set of rules, each team could have completed a research diary aimed at accumulating experiences. Probably, cross-national teams need to work in a sort of gift economy, and be prepared to learn from example, to promote richer reciprocity than if they simply follow the duty-and-achievement logics. We may be able to draw a more general lesson from the OASIS project about the difficulties faced in obtaining the planned follow-up interviews with the parent–child dyads. All the practical problems stressed in the paper, the hesitations of older people in protecting themselves and their children from the interview are easy to understand, but they may indicate more structural obstacles to repeating rich narrative interviews. It may be necessary to give up any 'panel logics' and fulfil our longitudinal curiosities by retrospective questions: the more intimate and involved our interviews are, the more repeating them becomes a sort of nonsense. In the SocCare project[1], when we did attempt to carry out follow-up interviews, it was often not so rewarding as expected, even with people who were very willing to co-operate. Further methodological reflection is needed on this matter.

In comparison to the OASIS study about the same subject of care, the project by Ingrid Eyers had many features eliciting a truly qualitative approach and facilitating its management: it is a two-country study at the micro level, avoiding complex co-ordination problems, adopting true case study logics and choosing the vignette technique as a pivotal tool of a multi-method approach. The very subject of the research, defined as 'the skills needed to care for older people living in a care home', points clearly to a node of interpersonal relations to be investigated in a very specific context, involving controversial emotional meanings. However, the research design tends to overtake the cognitive effort. It does contain a sort of strict internal coherence. Together, the sequence of the professional profile of the staff, the map of needs of older people and a self-completion questionnaire focused on professional qualities frame the selected narrative interviews about daily routines and vignettes. The material collected, thus, inevitably produces a certain type of information in the form of an official history of professional values and professionalisation, pointing to social recognition and precise rewards, rather than providing personal experience stories in context. Moreover, the vignettes are constructed as concretely as possible. They are plausible and real, rather than projective, as illustrated by the permanent complaint

made by nurses in every country about the time pressures imposed by work schedules. In itself, the grid technique is a neutral device. However, placing it at the end of a precise investigatory path conditions the way it works, reducing it to a technical non-projective tool. In the same way that a longitudinal approach does not guarantee insight and meaningful accounts by itself, the grid serves as a time-saving tool or technical effect, rather than a stimulus. It is much closer to event history analysis than to a constructivist biographical approach. Had it been placed at the beginning of a long active interview, it would have involved the interviewer in an analysis of the whole life course of the respondent.

In conclusion, as the papers in this collection show, the mixing of techniques does not automatically guarantee triangulation, unless we can ensure that the research design really makes space for inductive logic in the successive phases of the analysis.

Note

1. The SocCare project, 'New Kinds of Families, New Kinds of Social Care: shaping multi-dimensional European policies for formal and informal care', was carried out between 2000-03. Full details are available on the project website: http://www.uta.fi/laitokset/sospol/soccare/

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3. Adapting Methods: the Role of Social Capital in the Social Economy

Mel Evans

The recently completed European Framework 5 CONSCISE project was an examination of the role of social capital in the development of social economy in eight European locations. Straddling research and development organisations drawn from a common European network, the choice of methodological tools was influenced by techniques for social economy development and management currently popular in the third sector in the UK. Local community profiling and social audit methods were employed, the rationale being that a comparative analysis could be derived by adapting them to incorporate a focus upon an agreed notion of social capital. Two further reasons justified this choice. Firstly, it was likely that members of the research team and subjects would have some understanding of and/or empathy with the techniques. Secondly, it was thought that adapting the techniques to incorporate a focus on social capital might embed the concerns of the project regarding the role of social capital in each European location. Besides the problems of reaching agreement about operational notions of social capital and social economy, the project team became aware of the variance in understanding and experience of profiling and social audit techniques. However, the 'fluidity' of both methods and their capacity for adaptation to context enabled the project to take account of such variance. The paper argues that the European added value of the approach lies not in the production of a set of policy recommendations per se, but in the potential for user involvement. This was achieved not by the induction of users and research subjects into the barrage of methods available to social science, but by the selection of an approach and techniques that were rooted in the common problematic encountered in the development field.

Three important goals of European funded research are the production of research that contrives to add value, is relevant to policy development and accounts for and involves end users. The central argument of this paper is that particular attention to the last goal and a willingness to adopt and adapt new and unconventional methods can be beneficial in these directions. 'The Contribution of Social Capital in the Social Economy to Local Economic Development in Western Europe (CONSCISE)' was a three-year transnational research project[1]. The aim was to examine how social capital, social enterprise and social economy interrelate. The relationship between these concepts was established in three overarching hypotheses. Firstly, whether local social capital led to the emergence of social enterprises. Secondly, whether individual social enterprises generated social capital. Thirdly, whether social enterprises co-operated to generate social capital within a 'social economy'.

Social capital, social economy and local development in Europe

The CONSCISE project examined the role of social enterprise organisations within the social economy in eight localities in four countries (Germany, Spain, Sweden and the UK) on the grounds that:

> By calling a new generation of experimental projects *Third System and Employment* (ECOTEC, 1998) the EU has acknowledged the importance of the non-profit sector but at the same time tied that acknowledgement to employment policy, putting the projects under the familiar pressure of feeling they may need to narrow their objectives in order to account for their funding. (Chanan, 1999, p.361)

One long neglected area has been the extent to which the social objectives of the social economy contributed to the generation of social capital and more conventional measures of economic growth (jobs, turnover and contribution to GNP). The importance of the development of social enterprises and the growth of the social economy throughout the EU has been an issue receiving much attention since the 1990s (Birkhölzer, 1997, 1998; EMES Network, 1999; Borzaga and Defourney, 2001 Spear *et al*., 2001). Carlo Borzaga and Alceste Santuari (2003, p. 32) associate this new focus on research about the European social economy and the rekindling of interest in the third sector 'with the crisis of the European welfare systems built up during the nineteenth century and with the innovative characteristics taken on by non-profit organisations that have developed since the 1970s'.

From the perspective of European policy, the research chimed with the focus on social exclusion in the Amsterdam Treaty, the adoption of a European Strategy for Social Inclusion, the emphasis on acting locally for employment contained within the European Employment Strategy, and the requirement for an open method of co-ordination under the Lisbon process, which were all emerging around this time. An additional impetus came from a European Science Foundation Article 6 pilot on Local Social Capital, involving 30 projects in 12 member states, which had commenced in 2000.

The currency of the concept of social capital has been exponential (Cabinet Office, 2002), albeit uneven. Research accumulation has been substantial: for the OECD on the international dimension (Cote and Healy, 2001), and for the World Bank on the role of social capital in the development process (Dasgupta and Serageldin, 2000; Woolcock, 1998, 2000), the concerns of Robert Putnam (2000) with civil society, the exploration of the relationship between health and social capital (Wilkinson, 1996) were all received differently and had different impacts in different places.

Indeed, the CONSCISE project consortium had much less difficulty achieving a working cross-European consensus defining 'social enterprise' and 'social economy' (see Birkhölzer, 1997; 1998) than proved to be the case with 'social capital'. Given the unevenness of knowledge and familiarity with the concept of social capital, time spent developing a working definition of the concept for the project proved to be of value later. The working definition was also eclectic, due to the need to explore the notion within the context of the social economy and local development. The following definition was used:

> Social Capital consists of resources within communities that are created through the presence of high levels of –
> - trust
> - reciprocity and mutuality
> - shared norms of behaviour
> - shared commitment and belonging
> - both formal and informal social networks, and
> - effective information channels
>
> – which may be used productively by individuals and groups to facilitate actions to benefit individuals, groups and community more generally. (CONSCISE, 2003, p. 23)

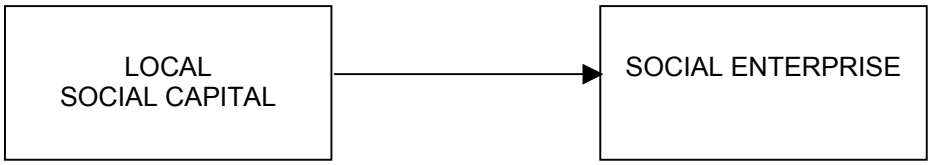
Advancing this definition beyond its usefulness as a heuristic device became a challenge for research design and choice of methods.

Research design and methods

The impact of the requirements of funding programmes upon research design has been a subject of much discussion (Dean, 1996; Hakim, 2000). Seasoned European researchers are of the opinion that the European Commission's Fifth Framework Programme was probably the most didactic yet. Structured within a bewildering array of horizontal and vertical dimensions, key actions and research tasks, the boundaries for applicant leeway were fairly limited. In addition, the structuring of the bidding process through the presentation of proposals in terms of discrete 'workpackages'

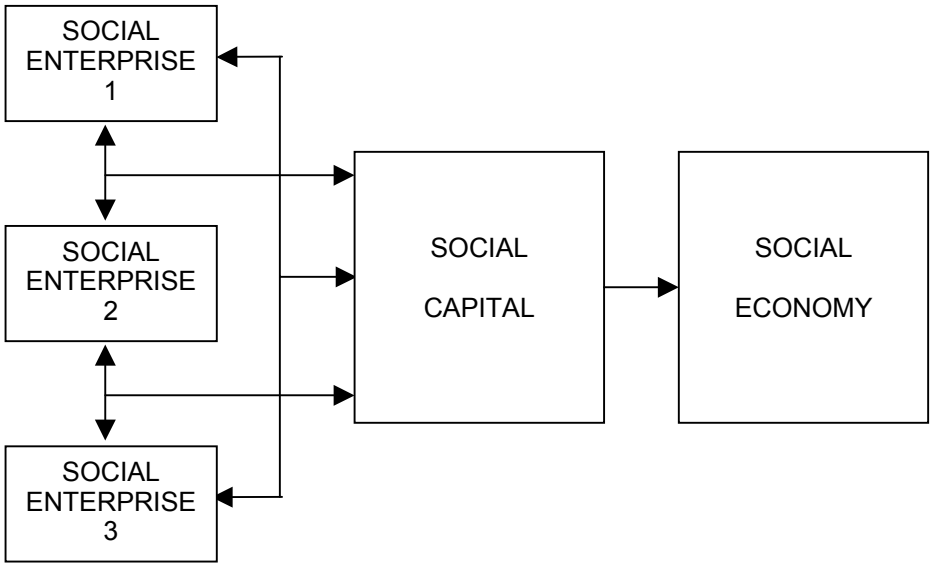
Figure 3.1 **The relationship between social capital, social enterprise and social economy**

(1) Local social capital generated by local community networks leads to the emergence and growth of local social enterprises.



(2) Local social enterprises generate further social capital, which is then available for further development.

(3) Through co-operation and mutual support, local social enterprises generate a form of social capital characterised as development of a local social economy.



(WPs) with tangible deliverables favoured applications that structured the research design in a linear fashion, making it difficult to re-work and revise concepts and methods. The CONSCISE project design, thus, followed a form that favoured an initial WP refining key concepts, followed by preparation of a methodological framework, then two extensive field research WPs, leading to consolidated local reports, a final report and dissemination conference.

The CONSCISE Project was conceived to examine how social capital, social enterprise and social economy relate to each other. The relationships between these concepts was established in three overarching hypotheses to be tested in the research design, as illustrated by Figure 3.1.

The research team recognised quite early on that different forms of social capital might be involved in each of the hypotheses. Indeed, at least one distinction was made in the research design that concerned local social capital, which had implications for choice of methods. The first relationship would require techniques to enable the research teams to assess local social capital in the eight localities. The second and third relationships would require different techniques, more suited to examining organisations. In addition the subjects of the research were social enterprises in distinct locations.

To explore the relationship between local social capital and social enterprise, and ultimately to focus on specific social enterprises, a good balance of types of social enterprise was important. To some degree, the selection influenced the choice of location, and social enterprises differ in their embeddedness in their location: balance of rural to urban, variation in the diversity (ethnic and other) of the locations chosen and, inevitably (given the time constraints for the fieldwork, which allowed four to six months for profile completion), level of research team familiarity with localities[2].

The commitment of the project partners to working with social enterprises stimulated the adaptation of methods that we thought social enterprises would be interested in. As a consequence, community profiling, in the adapted form of local socio-economic profiling, was chosen to frame the fieldwork to examine the first hypothetical relationship, and social audit was chosen to enable the examination of the second and third hypothetical relationships.

Community profiling has long held a place in the array of techniques advocated for community economic development (Cooper *et al*., 1991; Evans 1990; 1992; Burton, 1993; CEPCESA/CBS Network, 2000). Murray Hawtin *et al*. (1995), in particular, has established such profiling as pertinent to research in community development and as a form of action research based upon:

> a comprehensive description of the needs of a population that is defined, or defines itself, as a community, carried out with the active involvement of the community itself, for the purpose of developing an action plan or other means of improving the quality of life of a community. (Hawtin *et al*., 1994, p. 4)

Community Profiling has been an approach advocated by community development workers (Henderson and Thomas, 1987), in community planning (Wates, 2000) in local economic development (Blakely, 1994) and in the sustainable development and regeneration fields. Incorporating active involvement of the community itself means that local socio-economic profiling will be adapted to each context in which it is employed. However, in the CONSCISE project, it was proposed that, instead of wider community involvement, a ‘soundings group’ should be established in each of the eight localities, composed of representatives from different local stakeholder constituencies.

The most important determinant was the various functions performed by this group: discussants, informants, gatekeepers and advisors in different contexts.

It was envisaged that these Soundings Groups would guide the profiling process and that, in each locality, at least three core activities would be undertaken:

1. Construction of a local data profile derived from available secondary data sources and working to a set of commonly agreed data categories established by the project's partners.
2. Undertaking, in each locality, a social enterprise survey designed by the project to construct a profile of the local social economy.
3. The conduct of a local social capital survey, again designed by the project team. It was proposed that this survey be used mainly to examine the extent of baseline local social capital in the context of individuals and families. The survey was to record demographic characteristics of respondents and test attitude statements on a Likert scale, enabling proxy indicators of each of the elements of the working definition of local social capital to be derived.

The choice of an adapted form of social accounting was agreed by the CONSCISE partners as the best means of examining whether social enterprises generated social capital as indicated in the second and third hypothetical relationships. Social accounting describes the process whereby evidence is collected of the extent to which an organisation achieves its social objectives. To verify the evidence collected in social accounts, a social audit, conducted by disinterested outsiders, is proposed in a similar way that an organisation might undergo a financial audit. In this sense, we can define

Table 3.1 **The five stage approach to the social accounting process**

Stage One: Introducing Social Accounting and Audit
What is it? Why do a social audit? Key principles. Understanding the jargon. What is already done towards a social audit? History and current practice in different sectors. Managing the Social Audit.
Stage Two: The Foundations
Clarify the social objectives and the activities undertaken to achieve them. State the values that underpin the organisation. Prepare a stakeholder map. Determine the scope of the social audit
Stage Three: The Nuts and Bolts – Social Book-keeping
Agree the indicators of performance. Identify what existing records and data can be used. Decide what new, additional data will be collected and how. Agree how and when to consult which stakeholders. Organise the resources needed to carry out the book-keeping. Produce a Social Accounting Plan. Implement the Plan and monitor progress
Stage Four: Preparing and Using the Social Accounts
Draft the Social Accounts. Identify the key issues on which the organisation should act. Review the objectives, activities, and values. Set targets for the future. Plan dialogue with stakeholders. Review social accounting process. Recommend any adjustments. Plan to disseminate the audited social accounts to all stakeholders
Stage Five: The Social Audit
Select and appoint members to the Social Audit Panel. Present the Social Accounts to Panel. Arrange for the panel to verify a sample of the data. Panel to assess the interpretations given in the accounts, comment on the quality of the social accounting. Social Accounts are revised in accordance with the panel's recommendations. A Social Audit Statement is issued. Disseminate (a summary of) the audited accounts to all stakeholders. Continue to the next cycle of Social Accounting.

social audit as 'a means and a process whereby an enterprise can account for its performance as regards its social objectives and then report on that performance' (Pearce, 1997, p. 5). One established framework for social accounting is advocated in the work of John Pearce *et al*. (1995) and involves a five-stage approach, as illustrated by Table 3.1.

In the field

In all locations, soundings groups were formed and, for the most part, were able to draw on a range of local expertise and knowledge. Their main role in most locations was as gatekeeper and advisers for other informants concerning the availability of sources. Each location produced a local socio-economic profile that generated some comparable assessments of local social capital. In particular, some common proxy indicators, in the form of density of voluntary organisations per head of population (Knight *et al*., 1998; Smith, 1998) and voter turnout at most recent local election (Robson *et al*., 2000), were derived as indices to juxtapose with the survey-derived index of local social capital for each location. The indices are produced in Table 3.2 and show a close correspondence between the survey-derived local social capital index and the voluntary organisations indicator. Furthermore, the smaller, more isolated, rural and socially homogenous localities recorded higher levels of local social capital on the survey-derived index.

However, while the survey may indicate variation between localities on the basis of spatially specific bonding social capital, it serves to mask the extent of such bonding of social capital apparent within specific sub-groups of more urban, diverse and heterogeneous localities. In fact the local social enterprise surveys revealed that most of the social enterprises in the eight localities emerged from a specific interest community or movement locally. The local profiling activity also revealed the importance of accounting for local context and features of local economic, social and political structure in assessing the impact of social capital on the development of the

Table 3.2 **Local social capital index and proxy indicators for each location**

LOCATION	LSC index score (1 = High 5 = Low)	POSITION	Ratio of voluntary organis-ations per head of population	POSITION	Turnout at last local election	POSITION	Turnout at last national election	POSITION
Nästansjö	1.88	1	1:74	1	79%	2	79%	2
Val D'en Bas	2.18	2	1:96	2	76%	3	69%	5
Benarty	2.33	3	1:223	4	50%	7	70%	4
Umeå	2.36	4	1:101	3	80%	1	81%	1
Kreuzberg	2.68	5	1:249	5	58%	4	79%	2
Waltham Forest	2.75	6	1:320	6	33%	8	54%	7
Wedding	2.85	7	1:300	7	57%	5	56%	6
La Mina	3.03	8	1:817	8	57%	5	60%	8

social economy. Furthermore, both the role of the state and any conscious activity to build social capital (for instance La Mina had an ESF Article 6 Local Social Capital project) impacted upon the local context.

While the potential for comparability across the localities was reduced, the social accounting fieldwork produced a range of contextualised and qualitative insights into how social capital is used and generated within a social enterprise organisation. Case evidence was found of how social capital was specifically employed and built at certain junctures of the development of a social enterprise. Distinctions between nurturing bonding social capital within the overall social enterprise and within specific stakeholder groups, and bridging social capital between stakeholder groups and associated social enterprises and organisations was apparent in a number of cases. Above all, the engagement of key stakeholders in the social enterprises produced a heightened awareness of social capital, which in most cases led to activity to generate more social capital. As a practical output, the project was able to produce a 'social capital stock-take' kit to complement management tool-kits for social enterprises.

Securing 'user' involvement through adapting 'user' methods

User involvement in policy-oriented research is a frequently promoted tenet of research funding bodies and, although the potential drawbacks of such an approach have yet to be fully explored (Beresford, 2002), it is seen as a positive and ethical development by almost all concerned. The main focus, therefore, has been appropriate methods to achieve user involvement in research. One means to achieve it in research on the third sector, specifically, is to incorporate and adapt appropriate methods for management and evaluation that organisations already use or of which they are aware. Employing such methods makes possible a contextual understanding of how social capital is generated, which the present obsession with measurement does not. So, whereas measurement still remains a strong focus of social capital research, awareness is growing that:

> What is required instead is a series of intensive, community-based studies which (as far as is possible) start with a very limited number of hypotheses about the nature, characteristics and consequences of social capital, which can then be tested through in-depth, predominantly qualitative, community-based research. (Johnston and Percie-Smith, 2003, p. 331)

From the perspective of EU social policy, we are beginning to map the shape of a social model in which the broad third system will play an ever-larger part in welfare delivery. If the social economy is to become a major player in welfare delivery, then attention needs to be paid across European states to the impact and accountability of such agents. While social enterprises are keen to assess their role in local and wider communities and to strive to improve their performance in terms of their social objectives, their wider social impact also requires attention if they are to play a part in new forms of economic governance in Europe. For social enterprises, methods of social accounting, audit and stock taking that incorporate an evaluation of social capital building can enable a balanced approach to achieving equitable development, social objectives and wider responsibilities. For social research, a willingness to engage with and adapt such methods is perhaps part of a wider endeavour to configure a phronetic social science more engaged with 'analyses and interpretations of the status of values

and interests in society aimed at social commentary and social action, that is praxis' (Flyveberg, 2001, p. 60).

Notes

1. The project was funded by the European Commission's Framework Programme 5 under its Key Action for Improving the Socio-Economic Knowledge Base. Research commenced in March 2003 and was led by the Institute of Social Science (now Health and Social Science) Research at Middlesex University. It involved partners who were members of a single network, the European Network for Economic Self-Help and Local Development. The partners were: ISHR at Middlesex University, Community Business Scotland Network, Technologie Netzwerk at Technical University Berlin, Gabinet D'Estudis Socials in Barcelona and the Natverket for Co-operatives and Social Enterprises in Vasterbottens, Sweden. All project reports are available on the web at www.conscise.mdx.ac.uk.
2. The eight locations selected for the research (and the names of the social enterprises in brackets in each case) were: Nästansjö, County of Västerbottens, Sweden (Nästansjö Kooperativa); Umeå, Sweden (Vågbrytarna/Break); La Mina, Barcelona, Spain (CLS La Mina); Val D'en Bas, Catalonia, Spain (Co-operativa La Val D'en Bas); Benarty, Fife, Scotland (BRAG Enterprises); Waltham Forest, London, England (Hornbeam Environmental Centre and Gannets Café); Kreuzberg, Berlin, Germany (Kirchbauhof Gmbh); Wedding, Berlin, Germany (Zukunftsbau GmbH).

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4. Historical Methods for Comparing Pension Policies

Noël Whiteside

Pension security is currently a major problem for all EU economies. This paper deals with a number of key questions. Do funded private pensions, derived from an Anglo-Saxon model and exemplified by the UK, offer a better solution? What typologies of public–private partnership are at work in this field? The methods adopted in the research are archival. An historical approach offers specific advantages. First, it exposes policy dynamics; second, government records can reveal the why and the how of policy development. Third, comparing policy documents between different countries reveals the differing premises on which policy is founded, the different power bases of governing institutions and, thus, how similar political strategies become situated within different policy frameworks. However, this does not mean that archival sources offer 'revealed truth'. Government documents are preserved as an official record, but they have gaps and omissions. Moreover, comparative research based on archival sources requires extensive knowledge of administrative structures and archival procedures. Finally, with a few exceptions, interest in the analysis of historical trajectories among policy makers is limited, which discourages such enquiries.

Recent pensions crises in major EU member states have provoked extensive discussion on the relative merits of different types of old age security promoted in other countries. The focus in the comparative project on which this paper is based was the governance of pensions, rather than their funding and, more specifically, the constructions of public and private spheres of provision, showing how governments shape this division.

Pensions and pension policies are highly complex topics. Today, for example, Britain has six different state pension schemes (excluding tax advantages offered to occupational pension schemes and personal pension plans). Beyond this, comparative analysis of earnings-related provision requires an understanding of the relative merits of different contributory systems, different funding mechanisms and the different degrees of pension security offered by each type of scheme.

Within Europe, systemic diversity has grown over recent years, as member states have sought to reduce public obligations to pay for older people. Common demographic problems, the impact of the Growth and Stability Pact on social expenditure and recent instabilities in global finance have provoked greater uncertainty about the future viability of pensions. In many cases, governments have turned to the extension of personal funded pensions as an addition (or alternative) to state provision, but they have incorporated radically different mechanisms of regulation and public accountability. This development raises questions about the future viability of such schemes. British experience of private provision has hardly been problem free. Factors like these raise a number of questions that the project aimed to assess. What role should the state play in guaranteeing the viability and security of (in UK terms) occupational and personal schemes? What type of public–private partnership might work in such circumstances? What are the comparative advantages and disadvantages of different types of state regulation?

Such questions can only be answered historically. For pensions in particular, histories are important: a long gap exists between the passage of legislation and the

realisation of pension rights. The tendency for politicians to fiddle with established schemes leads to systemic complexity and public confusion. Furthermore, if we look at comparative pension developments since the Second World War, we find histories of divergent experience. In the late 1940s, many European states combined a basic state pension with occupational or professional provision for pre-specified groups of workers. The subsequent development of that final component is the focus of this project, since it covers a topic where relations between public policy and the private sector stand exposed.

Theoretical perspectives underpinning the project shaped the choice of Britain and France as case studies. These focused on how conventions of governance affect interpretations of policy. British and French systems demonstrated how similar strategies to address similar problems stimulated diversity, thanks to contrasting institutional structures that offered different political possibilities. Both in terms of industrial relations and social security, French institutions and the policy practices they embody stand in marked contrast to the British and, in some respects, to most other states in Western Europe. First, like other European states but unlike Britain, labour law in France permitted the compulsory extension of industrial agreements within industrial sectors; this marked the development of complementary occupational pensions. Second, unlike any other European country, the French state made no contribution to social security. The system remained fragmented in a mosaic of different schemes covering the private sector. Accordingly, the project was primarily focused on pension regulation and the construction of conventional divisions between private and public responsibility. Here, the French state's efforts to control the myriad of quasi-autonomous systems presented a pertinent comparison to the regulation of ostensibly private pensions in Britain today.

Theoretical perspectives

The difficulty of describing the pros and cons of a historical, archive-based comparative analysis lies in specifying what material is being looked for. Without a theoretical framework, archives can simply be reproduced as incoherent and highly descriptive narratives. Criteria for selecting sources are required.

This project is hostage to fortune in the theoretical sense that it confronts Gøsta Esping-Andersen (1990) on his home turf: his 'worlds of welfare' are founded on an analysis of postwar pensions. His argument rests on comparisons of outcomes: the extent to which welfare rights depend on labour market participation (de-commodification), and measurements of redistribution from rich to poor and so on. Only public provision via social security is ostensibly taken into account. By focusing on what appears to be a comparatively stable period of welfare development (the 1950s until the mid-1980s), Esping-Andersen argues a degree of permanence for his model: a steady state he has subsequently defended (Esping-Andersen 1999). Although widely criticised, his idea that welfare states are set within established policy trajectories has remained central to comparative analyses. Adapting new institutionalist approaches, Paul Pierson (1996), in particular, has demonstrated how established frameworks of policy development foster continuity. Institutions with deep roots prove resistant to change and agents able to influence policy development seek to sustain (or extend) their own significance and position. Within this approach, permanent worlds of welfare are reinforced. Only exogenous factors (like globalisation) force adjustment,

and the political form this takes reflects the welfare 'world' to which specific states belong (Pierson, 2001).

The alternative is not to interpret institutions as concrete entities that impose constraints, but rather to see them as fluid and dynamic: as repositories of past and present socio-political practices that are constantly reshaped to accommodate changes in circumstance and political demand. As economic and social conventions vary widely – between different regions as well as between nation states – so the significance of outwardly similar programmes or policy initiatives varies as well, as populations can only internalise them within their own specific contexts. Hence, for example, the idea of a pension carries with it a variety of meanings that generate different sets of expectations over space and time. It may, *inter alia*, represent collective (or individual) deferred salary, a tool of manpower management and, if funded, a source of investment for industrial restructuring as well as the means to guarantee security in old age.

The 'space' within which governments can influence development is also varied. Nor is it confined to direct state provision. Pensions objectives can be secured through the regulation of ostensibly private companies and professions. Esping-Andersen's work (among others) ignores this: for him, the framework of social policy is confined to state welfare funded by taxation or social insurance contributions. This division between the public and private product is unhelpful in the pensions' world, where, in many European states, provision is made through ostensibly private agencies endowed with public responsibilities. This 'mix' is not easily accommodated within a liberal political economy, which rests its case on the virtues of the private over the public, while failing to recognise how market provision of goods and services, including pensions, is subject to state regulation through the rule of law.

As some analysts have noted (Orleans, 1994; Storper and Salais, 1997; Dore, 2000; Hall and Soskice, 2001), contractual relations, the institutions that enforce them and their underpinning conventions vary widely between nations, between products and over time. Market systems require a conventional agreement on the definition of the common good: that is the rules specific markets must respect to secure the necessary collective confidence to enable participation in economic activity. Different 'possible worlds' of economic co-ordination exist, each reflecting different sets of expectations held by participants concerning the principles of justice applicable to their situations (Salais and Storper, 1993). Political judgements concerning the legitimacy (or otherwise) of economic and social exchange are based on past and future actions within these spheres (Salais, 1998). Far from being absent from any market activity, therefore, the state is bound up in its daily operation: as guarantor of a collective good that is not realised *a priori*, but is continually modified and developed in the course of collective economic and social activity. If legitimate market relations vary, so also do the possible vectors through which governments shape their operation.

Historical methods: the pros and cons of archival research

The focus of the research was the 1950s and 1960s. Significantly, contrary to academic assumptions of the comparative stability of postwar welfare states, the late 1950s witnessed the first postwar pension crisis. Governments in the Netherlands, Sweden, Germany, France and Britain all developed new legislation to raise pensioner incomes in line with rising prosperity consequent on growth. To explore the dimensions

of this debate, official and private archives were exploited. They are located variously in London (Public Record Office, PRO), Warwick (Modern Record Centre), Paris (CARAN and the headquarters of the Association des régimes de retraite complémentaire, ARRCO), Fontainebleu (Archives contemporaines) and Nantes (Caisse régionale d'assurance-maladie).

By and large, the focus was state records. Following a pre-defined period, the competent department of state transfers selected documents to the national archive, where they are open to public inspection. In France, archivists undertake selection and transfer: some departments, such as the Ministry of Finance, keep their records in-house and access has to be negotiated. Consultation with a friendly archivist is essential. In the UK, departmental staff undertake selection under the supervision of PRO officials; the job of PRO archivists is to offer limited guidance in the search rooms. Documents are arranged by provenance (the department of state that created them), although the traditions of record management and the provision of retrieval aids differ vastly. It proved quicker (and much easier) to use the experience of French colleagues to trace relevant documents than to work everything out for myself[1]. In the UK, the transferring department provides retrieval aids (lists of file titles) of records selected for permanent preservation; these are made available for public inspection as part of the departmental file series, once the records are open[2]. The PRO also offers an on-line catalogue (PROCAT) that allows distance searching on a subject basis (although it is not completely trustworthy). In France, by contrast, both lists of documents and the archivists in charge of them are held within departments and advance appointments must be made to glean the references that will produce the documents at Fontainebleu. There are no electronic search aids are available.

The current British approach to record selection and preservation now produces documents of astounding blandness. Much controversial material never finds its way into official files. French files, by contrast, contain a mass of verbatim minutes that allow the reader to identify key areas of disagreement and, thanks to their representation on French governing bodies, to understand the position taken by trade unions, employers' associations as well as local government officials and key administrators. Although much harder to track down, local records reflected similar degrees of detail and the contrast with British centralised (and far less visible) pension administration is very marked.

The documentation reflects contrasting conventions of governance that characterise these two countries. In the 1960s, both countries faced similar problems: rising social security budgets[3], demographic issues, problems of industrial modernisation, issues of monetary stability, pensioner poverty. In both cases, budgetary constraints proved central to pension development: both countries looked to industry for a solution and, for different reasons, parliamentary involvement in negotiating that solution was limited. There similarity ends: different conventions of governance translated the problem in different ways.

By way of example, in Britain, the centralised structure of social security administration allowed the Treasury more or less complete control over its development (for an account of postwar pension debates, see Hannah, 1986; Johnson and Falkingham, 1992; Thane, 2000). Here, we find no dispute over questions of public accountability: earlier elements embodying social democracy had been swept away under the recommendations of the 1942 Beveridge Report. In 1957, the Labour Party adopted a plan, initially designed by Richard Titmuss to introduce an earnings-related,

funded state superannuation scheme, which was included in Labour's 1964 election manifesto. The object was to eradicate pensioner poverty and to further state-directed industrial modernisation; the fund would be invested in equities. This provoked Treasury opposition; it was 'piecemeal nationalisation by the back door'[4]. Files of the Treasury Social Security Department show how civil servants delayed the passage of legislation throughout two Labour governments (1964–69), even following the creation of the larger Department of Health and Social Security in 1968, headed by a senior minister, Richard Crossman. Treasury officials argued that higher National Insurance contributions would raise industrial costs (damaging exports, the balance of payments and, thereby, the value of sterling), squeeze occupational pensions, which were the main source of industrial inward investment, and provoke inflation due to pensioner consumption and higher wage demands. Taxpayers' money would be diverted in favour of the better-off: costs would mount to consume ever greater proportions of GNP and, in the event of market failure, the taxpayer would have to make good any investment shortfalls. Inland Revenue experts were used to argue how tax relief on contributions would damage government receipts, and the Government Actuary showed how funded cover for married women would raise contributions for pensions alone to 16% of wages. Treasury representatives sat on key committees of enquiry; their memos and evidence delayed proposals from the Department of Social Security, which was the sole department backing the scheme, for months on end. The public records currently document the story beyond the fall of the Labour government and the disappearance of Crossman's bill in 1969, to the creation of Keith Joseph's short-lived promotion of private occupational schemes in 1973.

In France, the priorities of high finance faced a different set of issues. State influence on investment was not controversial; government involvement in banks and savings funds enabled it to channel financial resources in accordance with collective planning. However, the rights of central government to intervene in the administration of social security were widely contested. From its inception, as noted above, French social security developed at arm's length from central government. Local administration of the general scheme (covering the private sector only) was in the hands of elected councils with trade union majorities, the execution of whose responsibilities owed much to the traditions of French mutuality. There was no direct state contribution; the left argued that social security funds were socialised wages that belonged to the workers, who should have sole charge over their use. The problem for government was one of rising deficits, which were derived mainly from health insurance budgets that reflected the problem of an ageing population. Here, the Ministry of Finance had less influence on an emerging policy agenda designed principally to secure the solvency of social security funds (obviating the need for state subsidies) while also raising pensions. Raising pensions led the Minister of Labour to push the Employers' Federation and the main trades unions into a collective agreement in 1961 to unify all private sector occupational pension schemes under one joint association (ARRCO). This guaranteed a minimum earnings-related pension for all contributors. Thanks to the nature of French labour law, compulsory cover was extended to all French workers by the mid-1970s. A similar agreement created the French unemployment insurance scheme in 1958 (Union national interprofessionnelle pour l'emploi dans l'industrie et le commerce (UNEDIC). As a private agency endowed with public responsibilities, ARRCO's status is neither private nor public. On the one

hand, it retains its own archives; on the other, the European Court has deemed it part of the French welfare state and, therefore, not subject to competition law.

The problem of social security solvency stimulated years of dispute. In a series of ordinances (commonly issued in August, during Parliamentary recess, to avoid a political fuss), local administrative files show how governments of the Fifth Republic slowly but inexorably closed down the options of trade union dominated local administrative councils. Policy initiatives commanded the attention of the whole prime ministerial cabinet. As established administration involved trade union representation at all levels, each set of ordinances was met by extensive public protest. This process culminated in the explosions of May 1968, when funding mechanisms were centralised, worker representation on administrative councils reduced and elected representatives on strengthened central supervisory agencies were replaced by ministerial appointees. The whole reform agenda illustrates perfectly the establishment of the Gaullist state machine. While neither country offers a paradigm of democratic policy making, the lack of popular representation in Britain meant that pension reform debate legitimately took place behind closed doors and only involved a key group of expert officials. In France, legitimate public representation and control were usurped: this explains why social security reform has always been so contentious. In neither case, we might note, was policy successful.

Official records, thus, demonstrate how a similar strategy (the extension of professional and occupational pensions) was employed by both countries to solve the problem of pensioner poverty. Yet, the context, the problem and the solution were translated through different institutional mechanisms that embodied different conventions of governance: the points at which the state could legitimately intervene to achieve its policy goals. Here, we witness how assumed institutional equivalence, which lies at the heart of much quantifiable political scientific analysis, rests on invalid assumptions. The powers of the French Ministry of Labour to extend the coverage of collective agreements guaranteeing earnings-related pensions found no parallel in Britain, where voluntarist traditions of industrial relations remained dominant. In the UK, occupational pension provision rested with a largely unregulated private sector (even though publicly subsidised through tax concessions). On the other hand, whether French social security administration formed part of a 'welfare state' was open to question, as government neither paid into the funds, nor (before the 1960s) participated in their administration. Viewed from this angle, measuring state welfare outcomes as a means of comparison becomes problematic: where exactly do welfare state boundaries fall?

Archival historical comparison, thus, offers a window through which internal policy logics can be observed. However, archives are not easy to access and manipulate: knowledge of administrative structures and historical development is essential to establish a point of entry. Moreover, official files are preserved as an official record, not for the convenience of researchers: that official record is far from revealed truth. It has to be analysed rather than simply reproduced. In pragmatic terms, as the period of closure from public view has shortened, so the UK official file has become a formalised repository of widely distributed summary memoranda. The tendency was exacerbated by new workplace technologies: where once written minutes were the only means of collective communication, by the 1960s the telephone reigned, and official notes and minutes were in sharp decline[5]. Moreover, arrangement and transfer can be haphazard: the next block of committee minutes disappears from view; immensely

detailed material can document one issue, with virtually nothing on another. The idea that UK Cabinet minutes will offer a summary is illusory. The preparation of Cabinet papers within departments reveals how specific objectives were disguised in ways designed to win political approval. Ministerial papers are slightly better, but they are not public records and, thus, not necessarily open for public inspection. Nor are such records always preserved. Moreover, they tend to reflect the minister's preoccupations.

Finally, and most depressingly, governments in general show little interest in understanding the past or in learning lessons from it. This project has demonstrated that, among others, British governments of all political complexions have, for nearly half a century, sought to solve pension problems through the promotion of private schemes. A little history could possibly stop ministers banging their heads against a brick wall.

Lessons from comparative history

What is the value of undertaking comparative 'administrative-anthropological' history? First, for policy makers, the trajectories of both French social security and British occupational pensions demonstrate the problems involved in using official regulation of quasi-private agencies as the means to secure pension delivery. Here, the message is simple. Cumulative regulation complicates administrative processes: power becomes increasingly concentrated in the hands of a small central oligarchy of experts, who alone understand how the world works. In France, over the long run, this has completely undermined the authority of elected representatives over social security. In Britain, growing state intervention in financial services (its marketing, its investment practices, and so on) has had the same effect, destroying market signals that were supposed to be the very advantage offered by a competitive, market-based system. Products have become more standardised without becoming more secure: growing regulation confuses both industry and customer. Finally, in both cases, transaction costs rise: an army of legal experts and auditors inspect processes in search of an ever-expanding range of fraudulent behaviours. In consequence, public accountability and democratic control vanish (Whiteside, 1997, 2003).

A second lesson, derived from the first, concerns contrasting efficiencies consequent on different processes through which regulations are constructed to secure improvement. In the Netherlands and in Sweden, for example, recent reforms have been carefully negotiated with the social partners involved in running pension systems (Palme, 2003; van Riel *et al.*, 2003). In contrast, in France, in 1968 and 1995, the sudden external imposition of new solutions by the state provoked mass protest and political resignations. In Britain, the equally unilateral imposition of new regulations during the 1990s (first under the Occupational Pensions Regulatory Authority and, subsequently, also the Financial Services Agency) has not had such dramatic consequences. However, the objective – securing public confidence and raising voluntary participation in new pension solutions – has been missed by a mile.

Finally, what advantages do comparative historical methods offer to social policy analysis? First, they offer insights into the unwritten (and unspoken) assumptions that guide welfare development in different countries. Here, the apparently permanent contrast between the UK's preoccupation with the value of sterling and the profile of the public accounts, over all considerations of equity or pensioner security, is striking. In contrast, French Gaullist dirigisme appears to be almost a model of democratic

probity. This comparative analysis, thus, raises new questions: how to account for the dominance of the Treasury in shaping British social policy and, within the Treasury itself, how to explain the lack of discussion based on alternative perspectives and policies. The answers to such questions are partly embedded in Britain's imperial past: in the legacy of protecting sterling as a major global trading currency and the role played by the Treasury as guardian of that legacy. Conventions of civil service recruitment and promotion also played their part. The most successful candidates selected by competitive examination went into the Treasury, where they swiftly learned that promotion depended on conformity with established policy, thereby perpetuating what is sometimes referred to as the 'Treasury view'. Here, we apparently witness the operation of institutional constraint, as Pierson suggests. However, the contrast with France could not be more marked. The French government sought to cope with new challenges as central officials struggled to re-orientate practices based on mutuality towards the actuarial disciplines of insurance. The stability and potential continuity of established institutions is relative: both major and minor ruptures cause re-appraisal and, sometimes, new adaptations and compromises. We cannot so easily dismiss the possibility of new departures in policy that are the pure product of internal disputes and disagreement.

Comparative historical perspectives, thus, allow us to understand and interpret the reality of policy diversities that have been disguised behind similar labels. Each policy issue has to be viewed through prisms fashioned by past socio-political practice that represent, in turn, partial responses to ever-varying policy agendas. It is the slow, historical evolution of social and collective practices that shaped (and shape) what we might term 'conventions of governance' that lie at the root of policy diversities and the different meanings social policies find in different locations.

This does not imply that new departures are never possible: in both countries, such departures occurred during this period. However, it does suggest that, if the measurement of policy outcomes is to be taken seriously as a basis for comparative assessments, stopping short at delivery secured through state-owned mechanisms is a mistake. The borders of welfare states are far more porous than is often supposed: the delimitation of public and private systems offers a seductive albeit misleading route for comparative welfare assessment. History allows the dynamics of policy and its interpretations to be identified and the long-term consequences of past decisions to become apparent. Comparative histories can go further: to expose how apparently similar policies become so diverse in practice. Policy is never written on a blank space; the legacy of the past leaves its imprint on all new initiatives.

Notes

1. Hence, for example, the role played by Edouard Balladur proved important in the 1967 reforms of French social security (as a key minister in Pompidou's cabinet). He is still alive, and he controls access to his papers.
2. Normally after 30 years. However, thanks to New Labour's commitment to freedom of information, it is possible to see later papers on application to the government department concerned.
3. In France, this was more apparent in rising expenditure on health than pensions *per se*. However, pensioner poverty was widespread (Abel-Smith and Townsend, 1961; Rapport Laroque, 1962).
4. Treasury memo to National Insurance Review Committee: November 1964, on file EW 25/219, PRO.

5. The exception in this researcher's experience remains the Treasury files, where catty comments about lesser mortals in the spending departments still litter the margins of the Social Security Department files.

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5. Comparative Multi-methods Approaches to Researching the Care of Older People

Ingrid Eyers

The research aimed to establish the skills needed to care for older people living in care homes in England and Germany, and then to identify how these skills are acquired and developed throughout the life course from a comparative perspective. The two national contexts were chosen to highlight issues surrounding the provision of institutional long-term care and occupational training systems. Multi-methods – vignettes, structured interviews, self-completion questionnaires and life-course grids – were used to collect data in four care homes in southeast England and four in northern Germany. Self-completion questionnaires were distributed to all care staff in the sample homes. Interviews were conducted with care home managers, selected qualified staff and care assistants to provide a profile of care workers. The interview data were combined with detailed life-course data in grid form and the vignettes to enable a comparative analysis to be undertaken of the interface between care staff and the older people for whom they are caring. The research raised issues concerning linguistic equivalence and comparability of data and demonstrated the value of adopting a multi-methods approach. The findings helped to identify the impact of contrasting policy frameworks on care staff in England and Germany, thereby relating practice to policy.

Within Europe, issues associated with an ageing population are major factors that policy makers need to consider in a range of policy areas. Within this context, cross-national research has a key role in contributing to the recognition and identification of policy outcomes that might otherwise be overlooked. In the research described in this paper, a multi-method approach was adopted to investigate the interface between care staff and the older people they are employed to care for. The research indicates how government policies impact on both the time available to provide care and the acquisition of skills needed to work within the temporal framework of the English and German care home industry.

Consensus throughout the European Union (EU) is that community care is the most cost-effective way of meeting the care costs of an ever-increasing population of dependent older people (Jani-Le Bris, 1993; Walker and Maltby, 1997). However, it is recognised that each country individually has the prime responsibility and legislative competence to implement policies (European Commission, 1995). As representatives of the conservative and liberal welfare systems within Europe (Esping-Andersen, 1990), Germany and England have approached the issues that arise from an ageing population in different ways. Furthermore, the two countries also present contrasting approaches to occupational training (Roberts *et al.,* 1994). Consequently, they provide an ideal opportunity for comparative research to challenge implicit assumptions that any one country's system ensures that older people living in a care home receive the best possible care.

The research established how policies surrounding the provision of care relate to the interface between care staff and older people and how, throughout their life course, care staff experience formal and informal training that enables them to gain the skills

and expertise required to care for institutionalised older people. This paper discusses the issues that arose in the design of this multi-methods research, which was conducted in two languages.

Methodological issues

The research methods included care-work related vignettes embedded in semi-structured interviews. Data were collected in four care homes in southeast England and four care homes in northern Germany. Structured interview data were collected from all eight care home managers to establish a profile of the older people living in the care home and the staff employed to provide their care. Self-completion questionnaires were distributed to all care staff in the sample homes to establish a profile of how and where the respondents gained the skills required to work in a care home. They were followed up by interviews conducted with an average of three members of qualified staff and three care assistants in each of the homes, and the interviews concluded with the collection of detailed life-course data in grid form. The resulting 50 interviews established a picture of the daily routine in the care home. Four care-related vignettes were conducted to facilitate the collection of standardised qualitative data, enabling a cross-national comparison of the 'hands-on' provision of care by qualified staff and care assistants.

LINGUISTIC EQUIVALENCE

The collection of data in countries with different languages means that both lexical equivalents and conceptual equivalents need to be applied in the design of the research tools and the translation of interview data. The researcher's familiarity with colloquial English and German facilitated the design of the vignettes and the translation of the responses. As Corine Eyraud (2001, p. 279) points out 'translation is an operation using facts that are both linguistic and cultural'. For this research, successful translation was dependent not only on an in-depth understanding of English and German vernacular but also the culture in which care is provided. For example, the term 'qualified staff' was chosen to identify personnel who had gained formal occupational training as nurses in the two countries. In England, this meant Registered General Nurse (RGN) or Registered Mental Health Nurse (RMN). In Germany, it refers to staff that are formally qualified as *Krankenschwester/Krankenpfleger* and *Altenpflegerin/Altenpfleger*. Although RGN and *Krankenschwester/Krankenpfleger* are comparable, no English equivalent exists for the occupation *Altenpflegerin/ Altenpfleger*, which translates as an ' older person's carer'.

COMPARABILITY OF INTERVIEW DATA

Within each home, the data collection from managers aimed to establish a dependency profile of the residents to demonstrate whether the everyday tasks undertaken by care workers in the two countries were comparable. Further data from the home managers provided an overview of the age, gender, and qualification of the care staff The data collected also provided information about the ratio of staff to residents over a 24-hour period. This highlighted the contrast in the contact time available between care staff and residents cross nationally and, moreover, emphasised the importance of 'time' in the provision of care.

Further intricacies within the care staff samples need to be considered. Although qualified staff are supported in their work by care assistants in both countries, in Germany care assistants are untrained. In England, National Vocational Qualifications (NVQ) offer such assistants opportunities to undergo training to gain 'competences' in social care. However, the job title and the daily tasks in the provision of care remain unchanged.

COMPARABILITY OF QUESTIONNAIRES

The self-completion questionnaire established a more detailed profile of care home staff and their life experiences. The collated data provided information about the family and work history of care staff and their public and private lives, including how care skills used in care homes were acquired, acknowledged and financially rewarded.

Where possible, the same questions were asked in both countries. Both questionnaires sought to gain information about occupational training and qualifications. However, they differed in several respects. For example, the divergent occupational training systems led to a different set of questions in each country. No equivalent exists for NVQs in Germany, and the registration of qualified nurses is an unknown concept there. Consequently, these questions were omitted in the German version. Questions relating to job titles incorporated eight categories in Germany, whereas the English version only had three. English respondents are used to thinking in terms of hourly rates of pay, and German respondents refer to monthly rates. The question about pay, therefore, needed to be adapted to match the understanding in each culture.

These examples demonstrate the role of language and culture in the design of a cross-national research tool: often it is neither possible nor feasible to ask exactly the same questions in each country. Although the number of questions varied between the two countries, coding was designed to collate the data onto one SPSS file to facilitate comparative data analysis.

Research tools

An interview guide was developed to provide information on the actual work undertaken in care homes and the skills used to provide institutional care. The interview consisted of three elements: it opened by asking for a description of the work undertaken on the day of the interview; this was followed by the discussion of four care-related vignettes using unstructured, open questions; at the end of the interview, questions were asked about the interviewee's life course.

VIGNETTES

To ensure that comparable data were collected, vignettes were developed to explore how care home workers in both countries dealt with the situations they encountered regularly in their work. The vignettes aimed to establish how respondents would deal with contingencies such as the provision of care for 'difficult' residents. The vignettes also facilitated the collection of comparable empirical data without directly intruding into the daily contact between resident and care worker. Asking each participant to describe how they handled an incident they had actually experienced with residents that day would have resulted in the collection of qualitative data that would have been difficult to

categorise and that may not have been comparable. A vignette presenting a familiar occurrence in the form of a very short story and soliciting interviewee responses minimises such problems and enables standardisation of context (de Vaus, 1996). Crucial to the success of this form of data collection is that the respondent interpreted the conceptual elements of the stories as both plausible and real (Barter and Reinhold, 1999; Bryman, 2001). In this regard, the researcher's experience of work in English and German care homes was useful in creating scenarios that qualified staff and care assistants could relate to in both countries. The hypothetical situations described in the vignettes were based on professional experiences, and the responses given by the interviewees were rooted in their personal experiences as care workers. Consequently, the data collected reflect the everyday work undertaken in English and German care homes.

This method of research minimised interruption in the daily routine of a care home and enabled the collection of data without physical intrusion into the one-to-one relationship between carer and resident. By eschewing the involvement of older people in the research, ethical problems were avoided in data collection, since all the participants were able to give their informed consent. It also helped guarantee an extensive cross-national dataset. In my judgement, it would not have been possible to gain this breadth of data undertaking participant observation. Whereas the data could not document verbal interaction or use of body language between care staff and an older person, the verbal responses to the written vignettes provided indicators to the actions and thought process in the provision of care.

The aim of a vignette is to 'elicit rich but focused responses from informants' (Schoenberg and Ravdal, 2000, p. 63). A realistic vignette can be a useful research tool that generates comparable data enabling an exchange between empirical findings and theoretical assessments. However, as Haluk Soydan (1996) points out, in cross-national comparative research to date, vignettes have not been so widely used outside as within English-speaking countries. The complexities of developing a vignette in two languages, so that it is understood in the same way may also contribute to the fact that they have not been more extensively used in cross-national research, although their use is increasing.

The common factor in the care vignettes in this research related to the daily 'bodywork' undertaken by care staff providing institutional care for older people They present everyday situations at different times of a working shift and are related to a group of residents for whom the interviewee could be responsible. The 'residents' in the vignettes are also presented a variety of medical conditions and problems that can be encountered in care homes. However, adaptations needed to be made: for example, the English 'Edith' became 'Frau Schmidt' in the German version to reflect the different forms of address used in the two countries. This accommodated the cultural difference in the informal use of first names between English care staff and older people and the more formal use of language in Germany, where the first names would not be acceptable. The time of day was also amended to match the reality of the temporal framework encountered in the two countries. The vignette depicting Edith's situation was as follows:

> Edith' is an 87 year-old widow; she had a stroke 6 months ago and was admitted to the home eight weeks ago. The stroke has affected her speech and she is not able to move her right arm. Her right leg has also been affected by the stroke. Edith uses a hearing aid, wears glasses and has dentures. However, with help Edith is able to stand and hold

> onto her frame and, with support and guidance, she is, for example, able to transfer from bed to chair. Edith is frustrated by her condition and tends to be grumpy in the morning. Invariably, Edith also needs help to go to the toilet. She no longer has a urine catheter. The night staff sit her on the commode around 6am but then return her to her bed. You have come on duty at 8am, and this morning she is in your group of residents. When you go into her room, you find she is incontinent and has not touched her breakfast. You probably know someone like Edith. Think about that person and tell me how that morning would have been, considering that you also have other residents to care for.

Edith's stroke is described as having had an impact on her ability to communicate verbally. Her dentures, glasses and hearing aid are likely to have been part of her daily life for many years before she had the stroke and could, therefore, form part of her identity. The fact that she had a wet bed could well be related to the stroke, especially as she had had a urine catheter *in situ*. It can be identified as a factor that needs to be considered in the provision of care. The fact that she had not eaten breakfast could be approached from two different angles: she might have lost control of her bladder just after breakfast was served and, subsequently, lost her appetite. Alternatively, breakfast could have been placed in front of her, but the effect of the stroke meant that she was not able to eat her breakfast independently, if it was not positioned correctly, or care staff had not yet got round to assisting her. In the meantime she has lost control of her bladder. Edith was described as a person who was 'grumpy', a factor that could be part of her personality or related to the fact that she was living with a stroke. However, with help and guidance, Edith could maintain a degree of independence. With her glasses on, she might have been able to see the food or find the nurse call system. Although she had difficulties speaking, she was able to do so. With her hearing aid and dentures in place, she should have been able to communicate with the care staff. With their support, she was able to transfer from her bed to a chair. The vignette was situated at the busiest time of day in both countries. Care staff with an understanding of Edith's medical condition and ability to provide person-centred care could empower Edith to participate in the planning of her care and provide her with choice that could impact on her quality of life. Encouraging her to be proactive would also help her regain some independence.

The issues the vignette raises are unchanged whether it is 'Edith' or 'Frau Schmidt'. Adapting the surrounding issues to reflect the actual situation encountered in each country made it possible to design vignettes that presented the same concepts to all the respondents. This creates a realistic situation for the participants and exemplifies how vignettes can be applied across languages and cultures and, consequently, used effectively in cross-national research.

LIFE-COURSE GRIDS

Biographical data were collected to establish in more detail how, and if, care home staff had had opportunities, formally or informally, to acquire care skills throughout their lives. The aim was to gain an insight into the participants' educational and occupational experiences, providing information about the formal acquisition of care skills alongside their family background, and indicating their development of informal care skills. With this in mind, the life-course grid provided an effective tool to collect the relevant data in a short period of time. These life-course data complemented the data on both public and private life-course issues collected in the self-completion questionnaire, and gave

an overview of the lives of care staff that would otherwise have been more complex and time consuming to collect.

The predictors of a person's life course were considered to be family background, level of education, gender and geographical location (Roberts *et al.*, 1994; Saunders, 1995; Callaghan, 1998). Data relating to these factors were collected before commencing the life-course grid, which follows four trajectories: education and occupational training; employment, geographical location and family. The data establish threads of information that can be placed together in chronological order to reveal how the life events of an individual are interrelated. They also enable a comparison between care assistants and qualified staff of the same age, thereby contributing to the comparison of differences between qualified and unqualified staff within and between the two countries. As the focus is on key events that are meaningful in a person's life and related to both age and year, any inaccuracies, which is one of the main problems when using a life grid, should be reduced (Parry *et al*., 1999). In the grid used by Odette Parry *et al.*, (1999), historical external events served as 'markers' to help participant recall. In this research, where the interviewees encompass a span of ages from 18 to 65, more personal events, such as school-leaving age, marriage and childbirth, represent important data that also act as 'markers'. Collecting these data in grid format provided the facility to establish the links between their public and private life course.

The design of the research tool to collect data was relatively straightforward, as was the data collection. The analysis, however, was more complex as exemplified in Appendix 1. The respondents' data were grouped according to country, age and whether they were qualified staff or care assistants. The dominance of mid-working life women within all the care homes in both countries provided a fascinating insight into the convergence and divergence of their life-course experiences. This initially simple form of cross-national data collection indicates the complexities, not only of the personal life of individuals, but also how their experience is linked to the educational, training and employment policies of different age groups of qualified staff and care assistants.

Benefits from multi-methods approaches

This research resulted in a multifaceted data set that presented a detailed picture of the life of those who live and work in English and German care homes. The multi-method approach provided data that established whether or not the data sources were comparable and resulted in depth and breadth of interrelated data from the care home industry and its employees. Comparing and linking the findings to the policies surrounding the provision of residential care for older people in the two countries stressed the importance of acknowledging the extent to which formal and informal skills were used to provide care within a limited time budget determined by policy makers.

Cross-national comparison of policies highlighted the issue of time in the provision of such care, a factor underlined by the data collected from the home managers. The findings from the interviews also indicated that time was an important resource, calling on skills that are invisible, intangible, yet invaluable in care home work. A further policy issue highlighted by this comparative investigation was the role of occupational training

in both the outcome of service provision and the career path of people employed in the care home industry.

Designing cross-national research involves flexibility and adaptability to factors that are not only determined by diverging and converging social policies but also by the use and understanding of language and cultural diversity. Using a multi-method approach to carry out research within this context is complex. However, it raises interesting challenges that add colour, depth and texture to research that can constructively inform governments about the impact policies have on their voters' everyday lives.

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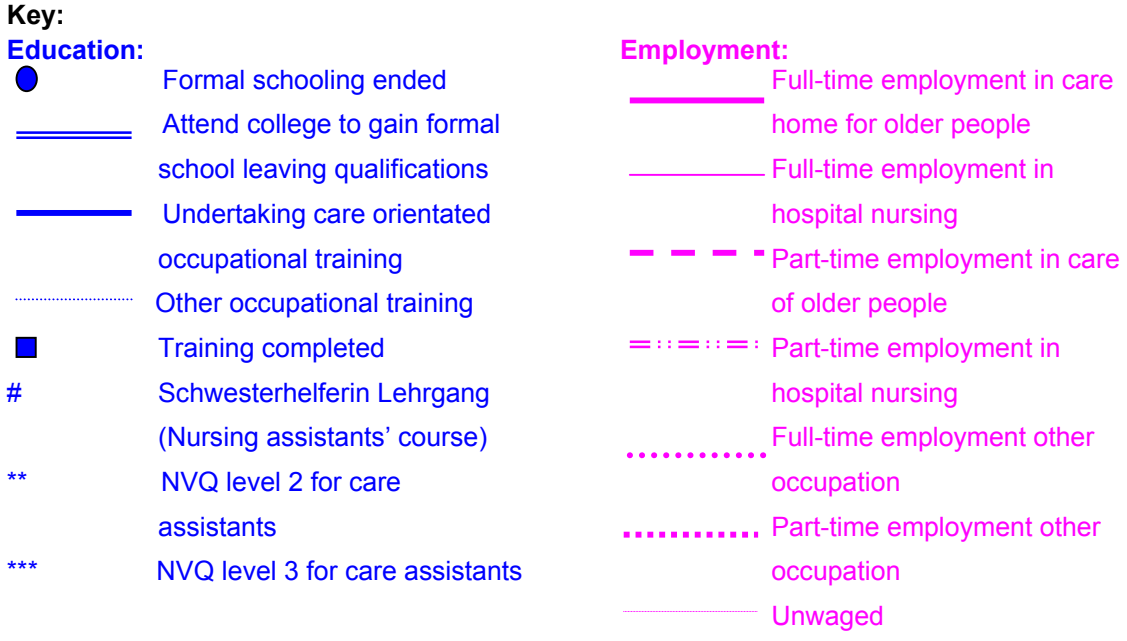
Appendix 1: Life-course Threads

Data focusing on four strands of the interviewee's life course were collected in the form of a life-course grid. The strands were colour coded and the Key below presents the indicators identified as relevant to a picture of the life-course experienced by care staff in England and Germany. The four strands have been termed 'life-course threads' since they contribute towards weaving a colourful tapestry of people's lives. 'Nodules' in each thread indicate an event that has had an impact on the respondent's life. In some instances, the thickness of the thread then changes. The explanation for these changes is also found in the Key. The 'nodules' in a thread could then be related to another thread to identify how the course of one thread impacted on the other. For example, it is possible to establish how the birth of children has impacted on a respondent's employment thread. By bringing together the life-course threads of cohorts of qualified staff and care assistants in each country, patterns could be established that facilitated the comparative element of this research project.

The following example aims to provide an understanding of the system. Gwen, Eileen and Kelly are English care assistants. At the time of data collection all three belonged to the 26–35 age cohort. The blue 'educational thread' shows that all three left school at the age of 16 or 17. Eileen initially started but did not complete her training in a non-care related occupation. At 27, she gained her NVQ in care as did Kelly at 24. The pink 'employment thread' shows how Kelly commenced work in a care home after leaving school. Eileen did so when she was 18 and Gwen when she was 29. At the time of data collection, Gwen was with her second employer in the care home industry. The green thread indicating 'place of residence' shows how Gwen came to England from abroad, while Eileen and Kelly have always lived within a 20-mile radius of the sample home. The red 'family thread' shows that Gwen and Eileen are both divorced and that Kelly and Gwen have children. The link between family and employment can, for example, be made looking at how Eileen's divorce coincides with the change in her 'employment thread' and NVQ qualifications. The dark blue cross bar at the end of all the lines indicates the age at the time of data collection.

Figure 5.1 **Life-course threads**



Training Grant
Changed employer

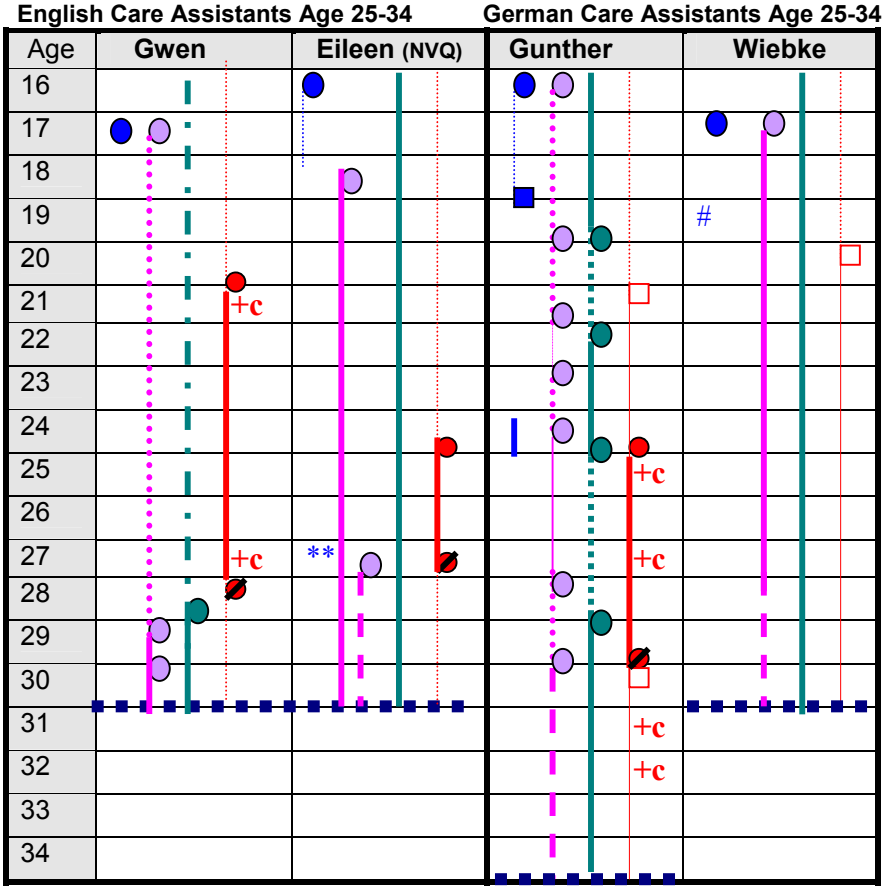
Place of Residence:

In area (within a 20 mile radius of sample care home)
Outside the 20 mile radius of present care home
In another country
Moved into or out of area

Family:

Single
Cohabiting
Marriage
Divorce /separated
Widow
+c Birth of child
+sc Stepchild/ren
Year 2000/01

English Care Assistants Age 25-34 **German Care Assistants Age 25-34**



6. Connecting Research and Policy: Service Systems and Intergenerational Solidarity

Judith Phillips and Mo Ray

The paper examines the mixed methods used in the project on 'Old Age and Autonomy: the role of service systems and intergenerational solidarity (OASIS)': a quantitative survey of 6,000 older people in five countries, followed by qualitative interviews with 50 parent and adult children dyads, where the parents were aged over 75 and defined as 'at risk of dependency'. The paper focuses on the qualitative aspects of the study to explore the challenges faced by older people in maintaining independence. The analysis illustrates how older people and their families in five countries (Norway, Germany, England, Spain and Israel) managed and negotiated change associated with the onset of illness or disability. The methods are evaluated for their ability to produce policy-relevant findings. The questions addressed concerned the extent to which cross-cultural and cross-national analysis is sensitive to the relevance of micro policy in each country; difficulties in transferring methods and applying different methodological orientations and disciplines among countries; the extent to which different methods are integrated and managed between teams; whether computer-aided software enhances cross-national research; how to assess whether policy findings and interpretation are grounded in the data; and what the mechanisms are for bridging the gap between cross-national research and policy.

Older people in Europe have moved onto national and international policy agendas from a historical position of relative obscurity. Widespread concern about demographic change in terms of the expected increase in the number of very old people and how to plan for such change has been one critical factor. Moreover, changes in family structures, including the role of women, traditionally identified as those most likely to provide informal care, have sharpened the focus of research interest and policy development. How older, ill and disabled people should be cared for in a context of reduced availability of women family carers is identified as a pressing issue, particularly when coupled with a general shift towards welfare cost containment (Hantrais, 2000; Daatland and Herlofson, 2001). Since the 1980s, most EU member states have focused policy attention on moves towards community care for older disabled people. The ways in which those welfare policies have been shaped vary and are mutually influenced by normative expectations in relation to family obligations and responsibilities concerning the provision of care and support of disabled members. Community care policies are formulated on a wide continuum with, at one end, policy rooted in a clear notion that the state is primarily responsible for health and welfare and at the other, families (women) are identified as primarily responsible, with state welfare support available only in extreme situations. Significant interest has been shown within EU member states in the role of intergenerational solidarity and its relationship to formal policy responses. Svein Olav Daatland and Katherina Herlofson (2001, p. 7), in summarising key features in European perspectives on care of older people, point to a need to understand more clearly the relationships between intergenerational solidarity, policy responses and the individual coping abilities of older people and their caregivers.

This paper is based on a cross-national research project, 'Old Age and Autonomy: the role of service systems and intergenerational solidarity (OASIS)'. The participating countries were Norway, England, Germany, Spain and Israel. These countries were chosen because of their diversity in welfare regimes and family cultures, where issues such as family solidarity and family interaction with service systems are central to the development of social care and support for older people.

The paper primarily focuses on the qualitative component of the OASIS research project. As the English Team had responsibility for developing and co-ordinating the qualitative phase, the aim is to present a practical account of the process of undertaking qualitative research in a cross-national context. We begin by reviewing decisions relating to the design, fieldwork and analysis of qualitative data. Secondly, we address issues concerning the impact of these methodological approaches on the policy relevance of our findings. In conclusion, we reflect on the outcomes of the qualitative study with a view to answering the following questions: is cross-cultural and cross-national analysis sensitive to the relevance of micro policy in each country? What difficulties exist in transferring methods and applying different methodological orientations and disciplines between countries? To what extent are methods integrated and how are different methods managed between teams? Does computer-aided software enhance cross-national research? How do we assess whether policy findings and interpretation are grounded in the data? What are the mechanisms for bridging the gap between cross-national research and policy?

Project structure

The OASIS project was designed to combine quantitative and qualitative components. The first element of the study focused on data collection using a survey. Subsequently, semi-structured interviews were conducted with dyads: a parent at risk of dependency and one adult child. At the planning stage, the original aim of the qualitative phase embraced traditional notions of triangulation by highlighting its potential to offer further validation of results. Secondly, it was anticipated that qualitative data would offer the potential to illuminate further data derived from the survey. This section provides an overview of key methodological decisions in the design, fieldwork and analysis of the qualitative component of the study.

RESEARCH TEAMS

The research teams were made up of people with diverse professional backgrounds, research interests and abilities. This diversity constituted both a strength and a difficulty. The commitment and ability in both the quantitative and qualitative research phases were variable. Qualitative research was an area in which fewer team members felt they had experience, in terms of design, fieldwork and analysis. Support and assistance were needed throughout the entire research process. Regular team meetings provided important opportunities for plenary discussions and decision making on planning, undertaking and analysing narrative material. The English co-ordinators produced a qualitative manual based on those decisions. The aim of the manual was to provide comprehensive guidance on, and information about, this research phase. A one-day event was organised where researchers had the opportunity for training on the use of WinMax (see below).

COUNTRY MIX

Table 6.1 summarises some of the characteristics of each participating country on the basis of primary social indicators. This information provides useful points of comparison both in terms of examining welfare state conditions and as a contextual

Table 6.1 **Characteristics of the OASIS countries**

	Norway	**UK**	**Germany**	**Spain**	**Israel**
Political cultures	More consensus	More majority	Consensus	Consensus	Strong consensus
Public social security expenditures	Quite strong	Strong	Strong	Less strong	Less strong
Social protection expenditures	Quite strong	Strong	Quite strong	Less strong	N/A
Health care provision	Insurance	NHS	Insurance	NHS	Insurance
Increases in general female life expectancy at birth	Fair	Fair	Faire	Considerable	Fair
Projected increase in higher age groups (80+)	Fairly strong	Fairly strong	Quite strong	Quite strong	Less strong
Employment rate in old age (65+)	High	Middle	Low	Low	High
Female labour force participation (65+)	High, slow increases	Middle, slow increase	Middle, slow increase	Low, strong increase	Middle, slow increase
Income position of the older people (75+ OASIS based)	Favourable	Relatively favourable	Favourable	Relatively favourable	Relatively Favourable
Percentage living alone	High	Middle	Middle	Low	Middle
Discourse on improvement of economic situation of families	Present	Present	More present than in former times	More present than in former times	More present than in former times
Discourse on compatibility of family work and female labour force participation	Present	Present	More present than in former times	More present than in former times	Present
Discourse on necessary legal changes of concept of 'family'	Present	Present	More present than in former times	More present than in former times	More present than in former times
Determinants of care policies	Potential rationalisation and marketisation strategies with conse-quences for private/public mix	Potential rationalisation and marketisation strategies with cones-quences for private/public mix	Reorganising public benefits by creating integrated provision and supporting implementa-tion of quality measures	Conceptual and experimental considera-tions about appropriate care provision	Reorganising public benefits with the consequence of reducing services and increasing cash benefits

Source: von Kondratowitz (2003), p. 57

backdrop for analysis of the results achieved in the OASIS research. Comparative data collected from the participating countries provided the possibility of exploring norms, expectations, attitudes and behaviours in relation to the mix of formal and informal care from participants.

DESIGNING THE RESEARCH SCHEDULES

The qualitative research was viewed as an opportunity to explore areas raised in the survey instrument in more depth: for example views on the roles of formal and informal care; or to locate the experiences of participants, for instance experiences and evaluations of help received. A semi-structured interview was thought to provide a necessary structure to the interview while also addressing research topics.

In fact, unstructured interviews with parent and adult child dyads were considered and rejected for a number of reasons. Firstly, research teams were limited by resources (time, financial and human), and unstructured interviews are both time-consuming and costly, not to mention appropriateness in cross-national contexts, in terms of management of the 'research act'. Research partners were also concerned that completely unstructured interviews might be too demanding of the time and resources of older participants, who were often very ill and experiencing significant levels of impairment and associated disability. Finally, research teams were staffed by researchers with variable experience in qualitative research, and unstructured interviews are the most demanding in terms of interview skills, particularly with participants who are ill and disabled. It was our judgement that a semi-structured format leaves space and latitude for the interviewer to alter question sequences and to develop lines of discussion relevant to the participant and interview situation (Gilbert, 2001).

A single vignette was used to support the interview schedule. The purpose was to investigate attitudes and beliefs regarding a hypothetical dilemma. Vignettes can also provide opportunities for participants to relate the vignette dilemma to their own situation and context. Vignettes have been used to good effect in enabling family members to discuss beliefs and attitudes concerning family duty and obligation in a hypothetical situation. They offer a number of potential advantages in a cross-national research context (Finch and Mason, 1993; Mangen, 1999). The vignette in the OASIS study posed a dilemma, which focused on issues of intergenerational care and addressed participants' views of duty and obligation in respect of adult children providing care and managing multiple demands (work, childcare and family care/support). This points to some of their limitations: namely their full operational feasibility in cross-national contexts (Mangen, 1999).

LINGUISTIC EQUIVALENCE

One of the challenges encountered in all cross-national research is the issue of linguistic equivalence. Many examples can be found in the literature highlighting the difficulties and complexities of agreeing linguistic equivalence. This does not simply relate to conceptually difficult terms but also to terms that may appear initially straightforward. In our own research, for example, defining what is meant by 'long-term' care and nursing care needed to be clarified across research teams. Susan Tester (1999) highlights the importance of ensuring that, even when countries use the

same language, concepts and terms are understood in their particular cultural contexts.

For Clare Ungerson (1996), the crucial difficulties relating to qualitative materials are corruption through translation. Whatever the chosen strategy, the problem remains that analysis, write-up and dissemination strategies are often reduced to a single language, with the resultant potential loss of culturally-loaded meaning and context. The OASIS project attempted to address the complexities of linguistic equivalence in cross-national research in a variety of ways, for example interview schedules, interview guides and vignettes initially generated in English, were translated and back translated by each research team in their own language.

IDENTIFYING AND ACCESSING THE SAMPLE

In each of the sampled countries 1,200 people were interviewed, including a sample of 400 people aged 75 and over. A number of issues were raised at this stage, which affected the qualitative follow-up interviews. Fieldwork was carried out at different times in different countries due to difficulties encountered with the sub-contractors carrying out the surveys. As a consequence, analysis was not synchronised with the qualitative stage and was not informed by analysis of the quantitative phase. Each country took on different topics for analysis, with little integration between them.

Following completion of the survey phase of fieldwork, qualitative interviews (T1) were conducted in each country with between 10 and 15 older people, together with the adult child the parent participant had identified in a survey question as the one whom they 'most relied upon'. The criterion for older parents being included was that they were 'at risk of dependency'.

Significant difficulties were encountered in accessing and gaining consent to participate from parent–child dyads. Overwhelmingly, difficulties of access were due to parents indicating a reluctance to approach their children about the research. This was identified as an ethical, necessary first step in the consent process before writing to or contacting the adult child in person. Parents frequently said that their children were 'too busy'; thus, effectively, making the decision for the child. It is also likely that parents may have felt anxious about involving their children given the likelihood that those children were often engaged in providing a variety of help and support to their parent. Adding another 'demand' for a supportive adult child, in terms of participation in research, may, on balance, have come nowhere near the priority accorded to other, more pressing requests for support or assistance. Moreover, a significant number of parents who met the criteria for participation were struggling to maintain themselves independently within their current housing situation. It is understandable that ailing parents may have felt either anxious or offended at the possibility of a researcher speaking to their adult child, with the attendant potential for their child openly to express their views about their parents' care needs and potential future. Reticence to be involved in research about families is also likely if they are aware of unresolved conflicts or family troubles that they would wish to preserve as confidential. A more practical difficulty related to the fact that, in some cases, parents and adult children lived long distances from each other. This made access difficult because we wanted to leave as little time between parent and child interviews as possible.

Each team responded by developing their own approaches to seeking the dyads based on 'in the field' experience of what seemed to work best. In Israel and Spain for example, the greater likelihood of close geographical proximity (or co-residence)

between parent and child meant that gaining access was conducted on a face-to-face basis rather than by letter and/or telephone. The process was quicker, more informal and responsive to the particular context in which the researcher was working. We are mindful of Monika Zulauf's (1999) reflections on accessing participants and the attendant realities of making research compromises when initial aspirations for the sample fail. In our own experience, delays in obtaining dyad compliance meant that some teams fell behind in terms of commencing fieldwork and participating analysis. The consequence was that the analysis and feedback phases had to be extended, resulting in a fairly ragged start to the process. These difficulties, combined with challenges for specific teams in completing the quantitative phase of the research and the high numbers of refusals to participate in the qualitative phase, resulted in the decision to abandon the longitudinal qualitative follow-up. This was unfortunate as it meant that the entire study was cross-sectional, and tracking change was no longer a possibility.

PILOTING THE SCHEDULES

Piloting the interview schedule and vignette provided opportunities to assess issues such as accessibility, understanding and relevance to both participants and research team members. Piloting revealed that, despite a consent process that discussed the research in detail, some older Spanish participants, for example, feared that the 'real' reason for the project was to discuss the possibility of them being institutionalised. Initial discussion of the pilot interviews also highlighted the importance of keeping in mind the need to discuss and agree terms and concepts used in translation throughout the analysis. It was in the piloting phase that we were consistently reminded that, while a service may be translated to an easily recognisable equivalent (for example, meals on wheels), it did not necessarily mean that the service was the same.

Data management and analysis

During fieldwork, all interviews were conducted in the primary language of the participating country and with an interviewer who shared the language. On balance, it was decided that interviews would be tape recorded, and this was achieved in most cases. Where interviews were not tape recorded, this was due predominantly to participants' anxieties about being recorded, which highlights the importance of recognising cultural differences in what may be considered to be standard, or at least common, research procedures. In those situations, interviewers took notes and wrote them up after the interview meeting. The fieldwork was undertaken in a variety of ways across the teams, again reflecting diversity of interest and skill in qualitative approaches. In Norway, for example, a researcher was employed who was also a qualified nurse practitioner, on the basis that she was better suited to undertaking the interviews. The Norwegian team also undertook the analysis of the interviews, while maintaining dialogue with the research interviewer. In Spain, interviews were originally to be conducted by the survey subcontractors, but this was swiftly altered when one of the Spanish team attended a qualitative interview as part of their quality assurance process. Thereafter, a member of the Spanish OASIS team conducted all research interviews. In a couple of teams, interviews were carried out by more than one team member but, in most cases, the work fell to one researcher. While this might mean that one person had a very good overview of the research, it also limited the potential for

engagement of a wider group of researchers and put pressure on individual researchers, in terms of time, effort and resource. This was particularly acute, given the difficulties in commencing the fieldwork for specific teams.

COMPUTER-ASSISTED QUALITATIVE DATA ANALYSIS SOFTWARE

The OASIS project needed a method of data management and analysis that could handle and assist the organisation of large amounts of data arriving at different times through the fieldwork and from multiple sites. It was also essential, given the diversity of experience in qualitative research, that a structure was provided that would promote a consistent approach to coding and analysis. The possibility of sharing on-going analyses across research teams is an advantage of software. Clearly, software packages have the potential for secure storage of whole datasets, which could be accessed both within teams but also across the whole team. Finally, we wanted a package that would enable participating countries to store interviews and analysis in their own languages.

While the use of computer software may offer considerable benefits to team projects, it also holds potential disadvantages (Richards and Richards, 1994; Mangen, 1999; Lewins, 2001), including the dangers of 'technological determinism' (Coffey and Atkinson, 1996, p. 166) produced by the dominance of a few CAQDAS packages. Moreover, the potential for being 'mechanical' and over-descriptive, and for over-generation of categories results in analysis that is not grounded in a reflective and questioning approach (Richards and Richards, 1994), and the danger of assuming that qualitative packages somehow 'do' the work for the researchers (Lewins, 2001).

On balance, it was agreed that the team approach to analysis would be suitably supported by CAQDAS. The WinMax package (Kuckartz, 1998) appeared to offer particular benefits matching the requirements of the OASIS project. Specifically, WinMax lent itself to exchanging files between teams, including texts, codes, coded work and memos. Finally, WinMax also embraced all the languages represented within the OASIS project.

Despite assurances, it emerged that the WinMax (1998) version could not accommodate Hebrew. However, by the time this was confirmed, all the other teams had purchased the 1998 version. The resolution of this difficulty was not entirely satisfactory but was achieved by the team in Israel purchasing WinMax (2000) and the English team importing text files from Windows into the WinMax (1998) version. It limited the extent to which the Israeli team could participate in dialogue with other teams within WinMax. On the other hand, WinMax was very useful in providing a structure and excellent for exchanging data archives, memos and transcripts.

The final result focuses to a large extent on the concepts defined in the initial coding frame. However, in addition, inductively-derived analysis was advanced to some extent. One area, for example, focused on the concept of 'reorganisation', which refers to how older people address the changes they experience as a result of challenges to long-established roles and responsibilities caused by ill health and disability.

INTEGRATING QUALITATIVE AND QUANTITATIVE FINDINGS:

Combining methods may result in convergence, where results of quantitative and qualitative analyses support the same conclusions; in complementarity, providing a fuller picture of the domain under study; and in divergence, when findings are at variance of contradictory to each other (Erzberger and Keller, 2002). Integrating

quantitative and qualitative analyses confirms that elements of all three possibilities are present within the analysis. From an exploitation of survey data exploring norms and preferences about elder care, it has been concluded that:

> Personal preferences for care and living arrangements in old age vary considerably between the five countries. This variation is consistent with their respective family and social policy traditions. Norwegians are more inclined to favour welfare state arrangements than Spaniards. (Daatland and Herlofsen, 2003, p. 146)

Convergence was found between this area of quantitative analysis and that provided by the qualitative data. Narratives confirmed that preferences tended to coincide with family and social policy traditions, although preferences are not necessarily what people would 'really want' but rather a compromise between personal wishes, cultural norms and perceived opportunities (Daatland and Herlofsen, 2003, p. 146). In this light, people from Norway, for example, identified help as coming predominantly from formal services with an attendant perception of the state having the primary duty to provide care for older people with disabilities and chronic illness:

The Spanish survey analysis and qualitative analysis illustrated a tendency towards identifying family care as the preferred option with formal services operating as a 'safety net'. However, in this example, the qualitative narratives captured more detailed information about peoples' perceptions of the mix between formal and informal care.

The varying perspectives opened up by different methods of study may supplement each other so as to produce a fuller picture (Erzberger and Kelle, 2002). Complementary results highlight the fact that quantitative and qualitative methods serve different purposes and help to illuminate different aspects of the phenomenon being studied (Kelle, 2001). Descriptive data on the range, duration, type and frequency of formal services used by older participants who participated in the survey highlighted differences in service use between countries in relation to welfare policy and formal service provision in each country (Bazo and Ancizu, 2003). Qualitative narrative was used to illuminate these data by providing insights into the experience of service use from the perspective of parents and their children. For example, it showed that Spanish children tended to identify changes in perceptions of filial duty. Older people also perceived the change but were more likely to ascribe it to a negative change in 'family values' and the lowering of the commitment of younger people to supporting older family members. Other analysis highlighted the experience of negotiating formal help. This 'brings to life' the quantitative analysis of service use and also develops the 'reorganisation storyline'.

Finally, quantitative and qualitative analyses may be divergent in their findings. Divergent empirical findings need not be considered as an indicator of poor research design but may also contribute to the development of new theoretical insights (Erzberger and Kelle, 2002, p. 475). Quantitative analysis of the survey data suggested extremely low levels of reported ambivalence across all countries. Analysis of qualitative narratives suggested that such ambivalence was an extremely important process. It was reflected in relationships in a number of ways: as long-standing historical features of a relationship between parent and adult child; as a result of some specific problem or issue; as a context for the management of change and uncertainty by older people; and as a context for the management of change and uncertainty by children. Issues likely to create ambivalence vary somewhat between countries: for example the maintenance of autonomy and independence in independent living in Norway, Israel, Britain and Germany against the maintenance of autonomy and

independence in intergenerational living in Spain. We concluded that divergent findings are likely to have been caused by design issues; in the survey instrument, a decision was made to use only half of the original ambivalence measure (Lüscher and Pillemer, 1998), and this is very likely to have influenced this result. Moreover, asking people to rate their experience of 'being in two minds' as an intellectual rating is very different from discussing ambivalence in the context of thinking about change, uncertainty and care decisions.

Linking research and policy

The ambition of the OASIS project was to analyse the interactive influence of the family and welfare state on autonomy and quality of life in old age by studying family care and service systems. A policy dimension was, therefore, an integral part of the project, and an important policy-relevant question was: what is the balance between family and service support?

The great majority of people aged 75 and over who lived in the community did not have a major need for care and support. Where they did, the family continued to play an important supportive role, either practically or emotionally. The existence of comprehensive formal services did, however, reduce the demand on families to get involved in the daily practical care. Women continued to be the main providers of care, even when they were in paid employment. A choice of alternatives was, however, associated with more satisfaction and a sense of autonomy. Services were mediating factors that had an influence on the well-being of older people and their families, which depended on the accessibility and perception of services. The more services offered, the more positively they were valued, and the more satisfied older people felt. The exception to this was Spain.

Our second question was whether services are complementing or offering a substitute for families. Family help tended to be higher in countries with low service levels (Germany, Spain) and lower where service levels were high (Israel, Norway). However, substantial levels of family help were found in countries with high levels of services. At the same time, areas were found, such as shopping and transportation, that were less well covered by services. Families may, therefore, be specialising in care provision. When some needs were met (and substituted for) by service provision, particularly around personal care, families directed their efforts to other needs and concerns, for example in the case of emotional support, where services are traditionally poor at replacing the family's role. Little evidence was found of the state eroding family responsibility. However, the data favours complementarity between services and families rather than substitution. The preferred model for elder care, illustrated by both survey and in-depth interviews, is a combination of family and welfare state responsibility, but with the welfare state having the main responsibility; again the exceptions were Spain and Israel.

The data, particularly from the qualitative interviews, reflected considerable uncertainty about the provision of formal care. When it was provided, it was highly appreciated and valued and appeared to make a difference between managing independently and failure to manage.

Consensus was found among the older respondents in the OASIS study that the welfare state should shoulder much more responsibility for future care. Policy should support a redefinition of the role of the family in care provision, allowing a mix in

informal family care and formal service provision, but with the state in a more central role than at present, again with the exception of older, but not younger, people in Spain. What this highlights is the importance of sensitivity to difference in our analysis. Access to services increased their use and was welcomed by all generations, with elderly people rather more reluctant to receive family help than adult children were to provide it. Receiving help from the formal sector enables them to maintain their independence and autonomy. Services should, therefore, be made more accessible to older people.

Policy approaches need to recognise the centrality of the family in welfare provision and to support family carers. Women are still the main caregivers for family members when in need. In the context of family and workplace, a key element in their increased participation in the labour force is social policies designed to improve the life of women. Equal sharing of care between men and women and high quality services for older people and children need to be put in place. To strengthen families' caregiving, special services should be developed like training of caregivers, supportive and respite services. Long-term care solutions need to be attractive so that realistic choices are available as alternatives to family care. At present, entry to long-term care is seen as 'social death' and, in Spain, as equivalent to abandonment. In terms of policy relevance, therefore, the project contributes to major areas of EU policy concern: ageing of the population and the balance of care between state and family.

To help bridge the gap between research and policy, methods have to be relevant and sensitive to policy questions. Research evidence or knowledge can inform policy analysis and development, but what does evidence consist of and what counts as evidence? Among other things, an evidence base means incorporating elements of both quantitative and qualitative research. Yet, the acceptance of qualitative approaches at EU level and among different disciplines is still a contentious issue. People's lives are complex, and we need to capture such complexity. We are not dealing with single trajectories of individuals in such research but multiple or linked trajectories of people caught in a social network. Qualitative and quantitative approaches need to be used appropriately to address different policy questions.

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